

'WRITING' MEDIA:
AN INVESTIGATION OF
PRACTICAL PRODUCTION IN MEDIA EDUCATION BY
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

BY

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Abstract

Chapter 1 provides an historical analysis of the role of practical production in media education in England . It discusses its varied educational aims. The need to consider practical work as a form of writing is advanced. Traditional notions of media education have possessed few theories of language and learning and have failed to conceptualise a relationship between critical understanding and making media.

Discussion of 'media literacy' and 'visual literacy' is followed by an exploration of models of the writing process and the limits of the metaphor of literacy when applied to forms of media production. Selective accounts of theories of writing instruction (drawing upon models of the writing process), conclude that there are problems with the metaphor of media literacy. By contrast Cultural Studies has conceptualised creative productions by young people in terms that evoke notions of the written. The central research question is formulated in Chapter 2: what sense can we make of media production using theories of writing; and thus by implication what change to such theories might be made using data drawn from educational research on media production?

In Chapter 3 discussion of methodological questions draws attention to two traditions: Cultural Studies work on media audiences. and classroom based action research. Different methods of textual analysis are applied to media productions by young people in the next four chapters (4-7) within the specific histories of several classrooms in North London schools.

Drawing together the argument of these case studies Chapter 8 describes findings from the research and discusses five key themes: the relationship between *reading* and *writing*, or media consumption and production; the role of genre and production technologies; the concepts of level and audience; the role of meta-language within the production process; and the pedagogic implications of the study. Finally the thesis suggests the need to develop a social theory of writing.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: CONJOINT WORK

Certain of the chapters in this thesis incorporate work which was undertaken by the candidate and the supervisor in the context of collaborative research projects. Material from these chapters (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) has been previously published under our joint names. Material from Chapters 4, 5 and 6 is included in David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green Cultural Studies Goes to School: Reading and Teaching Popular Media (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994); while material from Chapter 7 is included in David Buckingham, Jenny Grahame and Julian Sefton-Green Making Media: Practical Production in Media Education (London: English and Media Centre, 1995).

We can confirm that in all of the above cases, the data were gathered by the candidate working alone; the candidate was responsible for devising appropriate theoretical approaches to the data, and undertaking the analysis; and for writing the first draft of the published versions. The versions included in the thesis incorporate a substantial amount of further material; and these versions were of course also written by the candidate with advice from the supervisor.

Signed


.....
Dr. D. Buckingham (Supervisor)


.....
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Preface

This thesis has its origins in a number of interrelated debates about:

- the pedagogic purpose of media production (sometimes described as practical work) in media education;
- the conceptual nature of media literacy;
- young people's understanding and use of, a range of contemporary media;
- the position of popular culture within the school curriculum.

In particular, it will explore the theoretical ramifications implicit in the use of the term 'media literacy' through an attempt to describe various examples of media production by young people made in media education classrooms. It will investigate what it might mean to see these productions as *forms of writing*.

The enquiry will seek to establish an educational perspective from which it will be possible to view *writing media* as an integral part of the spectrum of competencies that comprise a progressive definition of contemporary literacy.

It aims to achieve this objective through an account of classroom based research in two London comprehensive schools. The research will detail the use of a range of media technologies in both individual and group media productions. The argument will be advanced through systematic analysis of both the social process of media production and the artefacts made by the students, with particular attention to their structural features. The students' reflections upon, and attitude towards these products will

also be taken as part of the communicative dimension implied by considering them as forms of writing.

Contexts

There are therefore a number of contexts which inform the purpose of this thesis:

- changing definitions of literacy in modern society, especially the debate and controversy surrounding both the concepts and practices of *reading* and *writing*;
- the development of formal education in popular culture (media education) and the need to identify learning and progression;
- the tradition of action research in media education and the growth of the media curriculum;
- the use of media production as a methodology in audience research in Media Studies to determine audience use of, and/or interaction with, media texts;
- arguments in media theory about subjectivity and media culture;
- speculation about a 'new era' in communications and society as a result of developments in multimedia and digital technology.

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis aims to contextualise the research in the first two chapters. The third chapter deals with methodological issues. Chapters 4-7 describe case studies of students' work and the final chapter concludes the thesis.

Chapter 1

This chapter outlines the wider context of the research by analysing developments in media education in England. It engages in an extensive discussion of the role of media production by students over a forty year period. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the role of practical work within the subject raises important questions about the nature of contemporary literacies. In particular it argues that, given the emphasis within the subject on *reading* the media, valuable insights into the literacy metaphor can be pursued through a consideration of media production as a form of *writing*. Traditional notions of media education have been unduly restricted in this respect; they have possessed few theories of language and learning and have failed to conceptualise a relationship between critical understanding and media production.

Chapter 2

There are four interlinked concerns to this chapter. First, it seeks to question the value of theories of literacy within existing paradigms; thus notions of 'media literacy' and 'visual literacy' are located within broader models of language and learning. Secondly, it explores models of the writing process and the limits of the metaphor of literacy when applied to forms of media production, focusing particularly on tensions between the sociological and psychological traditions. Thirdly, it selectively describes theories of writing instruction (of course drawing upon models of the writing process), concluding that although there are problems with the metaphor of media

literacy the emphasis within the subject is almost always on the reading half of the dyad. Fourthly it explores the ways that theorists of youth culture have conceptualised creative productions by young people in terms that evoke notions of the written. It thus poses a double question: what sense can we make of media production using theories of writing; and thus by implication what change to such theories might be made using data drawn from educational research on media production?

Chapter 3

This chapter discusses methodological questions. It describes the nature of the empirical work analysed in this study and locates it within several overlapping traditions. First of all, the data gathering is contextualised within the frameworks of action research and case study research in education. Secondly it discusses the variety of perspectives within the qualitative paradigm which are used to analyse the data. In particular the study draws upon methods of enquiry within recent Cultural Studies work on media audiences. Different methods of textual analysis are applied to media productions by young people within the specific histories of several classrooms in North London schools.

Chapter 4

The focus of this case study is a relatively conventional piece of media production - a piece of writing - although it is an unusual piece of work. The 14 year old author wrote a long story over a summer vacation heavily and explicitly derived from a range of genres, comics, films and teen books. This story is analysed as an example of boy's writing, that is, trying to account for the range of masculine pleasures in the text. However, it also raises important questions about the relationship between media consumption and the imagination as well as issues around genre, imitation and intertextuality central to the practice of *writing media*.

Chapter 5

Building on these issues, the next case study provides an account of a Year 10 photography assignment undertaken in Media Studies GCSE. The students' work and surrounding evidence of production is used to develop a social model of media writing; that is, one which pays attention to the cluster of influences that determine the inception, creation and outcome of practical work of this kind. Evidence of students' prior 'linguistic' knowledge and experience of reading the media is intermingled with an analysis of power relations within the classroom to identify the distinctively hybridised forms of young people's media production.

Chapter 6

This issue of power relations is made explicit in the next case study; an account of A-level practical work. Here a group of young women set out to parody Women's magazines. However, their production *Slutmopolitan* raises questions about the relationship between critical and expressive work within the media curriculum, concentrating on the issue of parody. Secondly it focuses attention on the nature of teacher intervention required for students to be explicit and reflexive about their learning and the purpose and place of such evaluation within the production process.

Chapter 7

The final case study took place within a second school and is organised around discussion of the role of new digital technologies in media production. Students' work in multimedia, that is the making of *hypertexts* and use of digital image manipulation and editing, is analysed. This account invokes current debates about the creative potential of the new technologies, but, building on the previous case study, the focus here is on the relationship between intuitive expression and intellectual reflection.

However, this analysis also outlines the theoretical concerns attendant on such a discussion.

Chapter 8

The concluding chapter draws together the argument of these case studies.

It describes findings from the research and discusses five key themes:

- the relationship between *reading* and *writing*, or media consumption and production;
- the role of genre and production technologies;
- the concepts of level and audience in a developing model of writing;
- the role of meta-language within the production process;
- and the pedagogic implications of the study.

Finally it suggests the need to develop a social theory of writing in general.

Media education in the 1990's

In statistical terms, *media education* (by which I refer to all forms of formal study of the media both as discrete subjects or within and/or across other curriculum areas), is now firmly entrenched at secondary, tertiary and higher levels of the English education system. It is most evident in the examination courses called *Media Studies*; which is the term most commonly used to describe the academic subject. Despite the depredations of the national curriculum which, it was feared, would squeeze non statutory subjects out of schools, according to Dickson (1994), nearly 20.000 pupils took Media Studies GCSE in 1993. Around 4000 pupils sat for A-level the following year¹ and Dickson (1994) reports a healthy growth at BTEC. At this time of writing indications for the new GNVQ in Media Studies confirm this pattern of substantial growth in the subject.

Although fewer national statistics are available for higher education, and this field is outside the strict concerns of this thesis, it is worth noting that courses in Media Studies were developing at a rate second to none and that, in 1993, the popularity of the subject meant that applicants to two prestigious London universities had no more than a 1.3% chance of gaining a place².

Outside the examined subject of Media Studies there is a consistent if varied presence of kinds of media education (Dickson 1994). The 1995 revised National Curriculum orders for English certainly make study of the media a legal requirement within the profile component for *Reading* (NCC 1995). Younger children are likely to encounter media work

¹ Informal information given to the author by UCLEAS.

² These figures were advanced at the BFI *Production Lines* Conference, Easter 1993. In March 1995 the Times Higher Educational Supplement reported that there were 31000 applicants for Media Studies courses for the academic year 1995-6.

within primary schools, but more often with the curriculum areas of Art, PSE, Humanities and, most frequently, English at key stages 3 and 4. Here it may be reasonable to infer, along with Bazalgette and Bowker (in Dickson 1994), that although up to three quarters of schools may be offering some form of media education within English the quality, scope and definition of such work is extremely varied (see Learmonth and Sayer 1996). However the British Film Institute's (BFI) Education department is optimistic that:

'there is evidence of [] increasing awareness within English teaching of media studies concepts such as audience and representation'. (Dickson 1994, p. 4)

All the formal syllabi in Media Studies require some form of practical media production³ as part of the qualification. Although this can vary in importance from syllabus to syllabus (from 20% in NEAB A-level to 50% in Cambridge B A-level 1994) and between course types (e.g. BTEC to GCSE), it is a constant feature of the subject. However Dickson indicates that at both GCSE and A-level 'practical/creative work/production' is only credited as 7% of the 'features or areas' of the syllabus. It is not entirely clear what this means but I interpret it as the weighting teachers of such courses gave to this area as an overall percentage of the kind of work the syllabus requires them to follow. However, within English at both key stages 3 and 4, such information as there is, would indicate that between 40 and 50% of media work is directed towards the production of printed or audio visual texts. In other subject areas, such as Art, this figure could climb to 100%. However, recent government regulations restricting the percentage of coursework in public examinations for 1997 have led to a diminution of these figures.

³ A note on terminology. The phrase 'practical work' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'media production' in this context, even though they are clearly not synonymous. For the purposes of this thesis I shall be using the term 'media production' to refer to assignments and activities which require students to make a variety of media artefacts - albeit with differing methods of production and requiring differing media technologies. Further qualification of the terms will of course, form part of my ongoing argument.

Measurement of quantity is potentially specious here. It does not really give an insight into the quality of such work, its pedagogic importance, or indeed its relationship to the central learning objectives of the subject. To explore these issues we need to describe how the subject defines itself in terms of teaching, learning and practice.

Media education: defining the field

Given the marginal place the study of popular culture has traditionally held within the school curriculum, one of the salient thrusts of much writing about many forms of media education has been to establish the status of the subject. A suitable analogy here might be with the way that early advocates of English sought to validate the subject as worthy of academic study (see, for example, Doyle 1989). Although, as I shall describe below, there has been some form of media education in schools in this country since the 1950's, it has been the growth of examination subjects in the 1970's and 1980's at GCSE and A-level, which have most significantly consolidated the academic status of the subject: (see Young (1971) on the role of public examinations in the construction of academic knowledge). The Education department of the British Film Institute strategically attempted to build on these developments and produced two curriculum statements in the late 80's which aimed to act in the same way as the national curriculum documents produced by the government organised subject working groups (Bazalgette 1989, Bowker 1991). (However, see Masterman (1980) for arguments against the anti institutionalisation of Media Studies.) In many ways the BFI statements exemplify a *contemporary* consensus in the field. In particular their attention to the conceptual basis of the subject has much in common with the syllabus organisation of the subject and I will therefore

be using these documents as a benchmark to describe the current state of media education.

One of the striking features of the BFI statements is their definition of the subject as both critical and pleasurable:

Media education in the primary school seeks to increase children's critical understanding of the media - namely television, film, radio, photography, popular music, printed materials and computer software. How they work, how they produce meanings, how they are organised and how audiences make sense of them, are the issues that media education addresses.

Primary media education aims to develop systematically children's critical and creative powers through analysis and production of media artefacts. This also deepens their understanding of the pleasure and entertainment provided by the media. Media education aims to create more active and critical media users who will demand, and could contribute to, a greater diversity of media products.

(Bazalgette 1989 p.3)

This position actually signalled an important paradigm shift in the definition of the subject (see Buckingham 1986; Bazalgette 1992). The BFI statement is implicitly engaging in dialogue with the work of Len Masterman (1980; 1985), generally accepted as the most influential writer in the field to date. Masterman had earlier advocated a form of education that would 'demystify' young people, defining 'television education' as a:

demystologising process which will reveal the selective practices by which images reach the television screen, emphasise the constructed nature of the representations projected, and make explicit their suppressed ideological function. (Masterman 1980 p. 9)

The BFI statement foregrounds a more modest intervention of trying 'to *increase... understanding*' where Masterman's pedagogy seeks to

'reveal...emphasise... and make explicit' (emphases added). The BFI talks of deepening pleasure where Masterman advocates exposing 'suppressed ideological functions'.

However what connects the two positions is actually a common sense of *distancing* that the process of education will exercise over the 'natural' mode of media consumption. The BFI's 'critical understanding' or 'deepened understanding' implies a conceptual distance from the immediacy of actually watching or reading media texts and echoes, albeit with an importantly different emphasis, the model of enlightenment implied by Masterman. What underlies this connection is the thread of left Leavisism injected into media education by Thompson (1964). Leavis and Thompson advocated a form of fundamentally 'protective' education, that would seek to help young people to 'discriminate' between various forms of cultural experience. Masterman, it has been argued (Buckingham 1986), effectively builds upon similar notions about the authority of the teacher in relation to the implied 'ignorance' of the student but explicitly replaces the values of Leavis's notion of high culture with an Althusserian model of 'suppressed ideology'. The BFI statement significantly distances itself from this position by moving towards a more neutral notion of intervention; although the 'understanding' it advocates as the purpose of this form of education is still inflected as 'critical'.

This inflection is important because other traditions within the history of media education have stressed its vocational function. In particular, the emphasis on media production, especially in the form of film making (which we will return to below) has stressed the acquisition of production skills as an end in itself. The vocationalist curriculum advocated by successive conservative administrations in various initiatives such as TVI or CPVE and now GNVQ all gave support to the idea that media education could mean learning the skills of professional media production. It is also fair to say that these initiatives did give an important boost to

media departments and media curricula in this period (see Stafford 1990). The BFI position focuses, however, on the more abstract concept of 'understanding'. This then attempted to steer a middle ground, subtly reformulating the Masterman position by holding onto the idea of critical understanding and thus connecting media education with the humanistic disciplines; while also explicitly opposing the functionalist model of teaching and learning advocated by vocationalists (see Buckingham 1995a).

The second important statement of position in the BFI formulation is that it implies a notion of development. The important verbs here are *increasing* and *deepening*. These imply, first of all, that children already possess some 'critical understanding' through their experiences of consuming the media in direct contrast to Masterman's sense of children's ignorance which educationalists might seek to dispel. Thus not only are children seen to already possess some of the knowledge but, it is also argued that it can be further developed through systematic attention to both the creative and critical faculties.

The BFI statements then go on to describe what exactly has to be understood; the content of the subject, as it were. Here, however, these statements seem to perform a linguistic conjuring trick. They describe what has to be understood in terms of *conceptual* areas. Rather perversely, in the light of the common four key concepts contemporaneously present in GCSE syllabi (viz. forms and conventions, representation, institutions and audiences) the BFI documents list six. These are: media languages, agencies, categories, technologies, audiences and representations. The current A-levels have now reduced these to three (texts, audiences and institutions) and this strikes me as the most economical formulation.

The important issue here is not the number of concepts but the educational significance of defining content as concepts (as opposed to say knowledge about media industries or production processes) because it begs the question of how students might 'understand' a concept in the first place.

Following on from this we also need to question how a concept might be *taught*. Clearly students following media education courses study or make specific media products or production processes rather than abstract ideas. How their understanding of a concept is made manifest through such courses and how such conceptual understanding may be progressed is extremely complicated. These issues have been most explicitly raised in the conclusion to *Watching Media Learning* (Buckingham 1990). Here, Buckingham drew on the work of Vygotsky (1962) to explain how the conceptual framework of media education might relate to the processes of media teaching and learning. In particular the relationship between academic expressions of conceptual understanding on the one hand, and experience or implicit understanding on the other, were central to the enquiry. To an extent this remains an unresolved subject for further investigation (see below Chapters 5-7).

Buckingham, however, does not suggest why media educators developed this model of describing the subject in this way in the first place. To an extent *Watching Media Learning* emerges from an academic tradition which makes similar use of Vygotsky within the field of English education. Here the tradition was to explore the developmental relationships between thought and language growth (Barnes et al 1969). Indeed Buckingham's project may be seen as part of a wider movement (see Mercer 1992; Wertsch 1990). However, although this model of media education is founded on the teacher devised syllabi of the 1970's there are few extant arguments as to why media education describes itself in terms of concepts; that is, what the explicit *educational* rationale for such a model might be.

One way of answering this question can be found in the requirement for academic respectability. The language of concepts is abstract and appears to be more theoretical. Indeed, the highly theoretical rationale of contemporary media education thus betrays the subject's origins in film theory and can be seen in an earlier description of 'the 'field' of film study'

(*Screen Education* 1974). Here the predilection for abstractions was in explicit opposition to the use of canonical authors and texts which was the dominant way of defining liberal arts subjects at the time. It certainly appeared to lend a more scientific and less emotive 'feel' to the subject and circumvented the need for a language of value judgement.

However, retrospective readings of these documents must be sensitive to the fact that they do not only represent the work of teachers but also of academics, advisors and other policy strategists attempting to reach other audiences and colonise other spaces. It is perhaps unreasonable to expect an educational rationale to be laid out on our 1990's terms. For example, one sensible and practical reason not to define the subject in terms of *content* is that media education syllabi wish to retain an ability to be contemporary or relevant, and not to fall into the trap of canonising particular texts which is a common critique of English. Nevertheless, as I have already indicated, 'new' disciplines also need to assert their integrity in the academy. The theoretical tone and lack of explicit reference to the day-to-day 'trivia' of specific media output establishes a notion of credible intellectual difficulty. Given the vogue for tabloid ridiculing of the subject this argument may still have to be won. Following Bourdieu (1984), one can equally well argue that the conceptual matrix was partly a response to the need to create a sense of distance between the academic study of popular culture and the immediacy of responses to it. The conceptual framework acts as a filtering mechanism to fulfil such a function.

There is therefore a paradox about the place of media education within the curriculum. On the one hand the place of popular culture within schools can be seen as potentially subversive and fundamentally at odds with the received place of schools as transmitters of high culture - a position made evident in the national curriculum documents for English (see especially the proposed revisions to the 'Cox' curriculum in April 1993 and September 1994) - and the consistently hostile attitude taken towards the

study of popular media in schools as reported in the press. On the other hand the academic subject of Media Studies establishes credibility through a framework of concepts which emphasise distance from their object of study. We will return to these questions of status, academic discourse and the problem of conceptual learning throughout this thesis.

Theory and practice

The BFI's focus on the understanding of concepts does squarely balance 'analysis' with 'production' and therefore, what it calls 'critical' with 'creative' powers. Indeed this balance is nicely preserved in the final sentence quoted from the curriculum statement above, when it talks about a future citizenry composed of 'critical media users' who are going to both demand 'and contribute to' a new media order. The contribution will presumably take place through new and different media output. The discussion above has concentrated so far on the intellectual and conceptual aspects of the subject but it could be argued here that an equal emphasis is given to the creative and *making* aspects of the subject.

It is worthwhile pointing out immediately that most Media Studies syllabi do not give this equal balance to both aspects of the subject (see above). Secondly media production does not have the same academic status as intellectual labour; and in the light of the arguments already discussed, about the subject's anxiety to bestow academic status upon itself, the equivalence between these two dimensions needs to be re-evaluated. These two themes have dominated discussion of media production within the subject area over the last forty years. It is to this history that we now turn.

Defining what is meant by 'media production' in the first place is, however, more complicated than it seems. First of all the term 'media production' covers a range of media forms. Most students will make some

kind of newspaper or magazine during their school career (Dickson 1994), many make adverts, but not all will use video, or audio; and even within those categories only some will have access to editing equipment. Equally some teachers might use the term 'media production' to include the manipulation of prepared images in publications like *The Visit* or *Production Practices* (EMC 1978,1994). Others might expect the use of up-to-date media technologies to play a part; or that the material young people produce should be in some way 'original'. The fact that the terms 'media production' (or 'practical work') might be used to describe a variety of work across a range of media is itself a problem when it comes to finding a common explanation of its aims. Inevitably, different work in different media might meet differing and contradictory objectives. It would also be true to say that students' experiences of media education might take place across different academic subjects and that these subjects carry their own definitions of media production. Thus, in Art or English the *skills* of media production - drawing or writing - are often seen to have an intrinsic value; whereas in Media Studies it is conceptual understanding that is often held up to be the purpose of such work (Buckingham 1990b).

Nor is there even a single notion of media production within the examination syllabii of Media Studies. Indeed, debates about whether such work should be individual or collaborative; what should be a minimum technological requirement (cameras, editing equipment etc.); whether it should take place as a simulation or an exercise; and particularly how it should be assessed - as product or process - are still urgently debated. Indeed the (1995) GNVQ in Media is one of the first syllabii to attempt to do this. I do not wish to become embroiled in these discussions at this level but merely to point out that all generalisations about the role of media production work run the risk of trying to apply too rigid a theory to a complex range of activities. Indeed, I have not even mentioned the *informal* uses of media production - in domestic photography, mixing music,

manipulating images on computers in young people's bedroom spaces - all of which are clearly part of, but also different from, the structured curriculum activities of media production (see Willis 1990).

Nevertheless, there is a central idea that holds all these different models of media production together: that students will learn how media texts are made through constructing them themselves. In fact, even this is best imagined as a continuum: at one extreme is the idea that students are making media texts that *express* their concerns and interests; at the other, students are learning the mechanics of how the machine works by taking it to pieces and putting it back together again. However, I shall argue that the debate between these different positions is inextricably bound up with changing definitions of language and therefore with assumptions about the relationships between 'reading' and 'writing'. It is through a discussion about the role of *language* within media production that I will raise the key questions that lie at the heart of this thesis.

Film making and film language: the 1950's

There is evidence that a small amount of film education took place as early as the 1930's. Miller (1979) refers to an American survey showing that 200 schools were engaged in film education in 1939. The British Film Institute's Roger Manvell ran film courses in the 1930's and 1940's (see Whannel and Harcourt 1964). There is the pointedly entitled article, 'Reinventing the wheel: 10 questions about teaching and using film being asked in the 70's that were answered in the 40's' (Donelson 1971) which certainly implies extensive practice in film education. However, despite the rather dubious statistic in Peters (1961), that over 700 schools did some form of film education, that author identifies the 'so-called Wheare report of 1950' as 'the English charter of film teaching'. I am going to take three texts from

this early period to explore how media production developed. There are two books published by The British Film Institute: Hills' (1950) *Films and Children: the Positive Approach*, and Greiner's (1955) *Teaching Film: a Guide to Classroom Method*; as well as Peters' (1961) book *Teaching about Film*.

There is a protectionist element in all these texts. Characteristically for the time Peters highlights the 'dangers of film and the necessity of arming young people against those dangers'. This echoes Hills' description of recent courses in Leeds and Birmingham that study 'advertisements, comics, 'bloods', women's magazines, the popular press, films and radio' (incidentally virtually the only reference to media other than film). Hills asks the key question: 'How, when false values assail children and their parents on all sides, is discrimination to be taught?' Similarly, Greiner makes the case that film education should 'help develop a critical approach to film.... in the face of values from Hollywood'. However, both Peters and Greiner, and to a lesser extent Hills, place media production in film-making at the heart of their recommendations for the classroom teacher; and it is here that we can first see the emergent paradigms which have continued to underpin media production today.

Both Hills and Greiner make tentative comparisons between film-making and other subjects. They are clearly anxious about the status of popular media in the context of the curriculum despite their confidence in the educational value of such activities. Thus, they attempt to justify such work in relation to traditional subject areas:

The preliminary stages in composing a story and scripting it in carefully worked out steps, have a considerable bearing on the study and practice of English and Art.(Greiner p.17)

Later Greiner attempts to argue that films are in some way equivalent (as discursive forms, we might say) to:

drama, the novel, poetry, television and Radio, the scene being set for a characterisation of each - the content, structure, language, characterisation and shape (Greiner p 25)

The point about her comparison is that it carries within it the implication that making films is in some way equivalent to the 'higher' arts of novel writing etc.; and thus, that teaching media production *might* be equated with the role of writing in the teaching of English. However, she directly refuses this opportunity and moves to the common liberal explanations for film-making that still underlie much classroom work. It is 'popular', 'fun', supports group work and gives children 'opportunities to become creative artists in this medium'. The implication here is that artistry is a generalised attribute of the individual rather than the sum of any formal learning. (One can perhaps also infer from this the kind of students for whom media work is deemed most appropriate, the kind of student who needs 'popular' forms of 'fun' - that is, the working class child).

Greiner also describes 'working exercises', a term still common in media education⁴, and describes sketching out scenes in order to get students to 'see that the sequence [of scenes in a film] is a matter of editing'. Today the terms used would be storyboarding and narrative; but the idea of getting students to break down sequences in this way is still common practice. In this context Hills quotes Stanley Reed, the first head of education at the BFI. Reed apparently carried out work with young people examining lighting and camera angles to bring about 'an awakening pleasure in technique'⁵. Reed and Hills' argument was that 'film making leads to analysis' which they felt was more productive than starting with 'dissection...through formal analysis'. The implication here is *not* that one can learn *different* things about the way film is put together through media production - but that it is merely a better way of learning the *same* thing.

⁴ Only in 1994 for example did the practical component in the largest A-level syllabus (Cambridge A) change its name from 'Production Exercises' to 'Media Production'.

⁵ Reed's successor Cary Bazalgette also uses this argument as one of the prime rationales for media education beyond the next millennium (Bazalgette 1992).

By contrast, Peters flirts with a wholesale realisation that 'film... is a new language, [a] new means of understanding... and a new means of gaining knowledge'. Leaving aside the transcendental aspirations of such a statement, he is clearly being more assertive than Greiner about the fact that studying film involves the *linguistic* dimension and that the appropriate language might have to be acquired, and used in relevant circumstances. The acquisition of film language, however, is not integrated into Peters' broader rationale for film education which is 'to protect young people against the moral dangers of the cinema...[and] to cultivate their aesthetic taste'. This makes an interesting contrast with the way in which these two themes (the formal study language and the subject's civilising mission) were becoming entwined in the sister subject of English (see for example, Thompson 1964).

When Peters does focus on media production it is to stress de-contextualised and grammatical 'exercises'. Like Greiner and Hills, he stresses the discipline of using comic strips and 'shooting scripts' or 'treatments': Hills in fact talks of stories that are 'translated into visual terms'. However, Peters' description of films he has made with school students seem arid and abstract. Such film-making concentrates entirely on technical problems: the content is simply a pretence to learn the grammar. For example, he describes a film of a Mr. Smith leaving home and crossing the road and getting run over. Who Mr. Smith might be, why he might want to cross the road, why we might want to portray this, are unanswered questions. For Peters, content is subordinate to technique; and although there is an implicit pedagogy - that if we learn the technique we can't be taken in by film and therefore be deluded by its moral values - this broader argument is not developed.

However, Peters clearly reflects a wider social awareness of language as something that should be defined in the plural rather than simply in terms of verbal or written language. He makes this point explicitly:

I use the term 'film language' (and 'visual language') analogically because the analogy between verbal language and film language is very plain. Both words and images may be used to convey 'ideas about something' and in both cases there are more or less definite rules and laws that govern this process. (p.22)

This is an argument for learning the language of the cinema in the same way that one might learn a foreign language; although of course it does not account for the fact that one can be a fluent 'reader' of film without being able to 'write' it. However, Peters shies away from this inference: he continues that 'this comparison does not, however, include any suggestion that the two form-systems are identical'.

Of course the closeness of this analogy lies at the heart of more extended analyses of film language. It would however, be a mistake to associate the work of these film educationalists with the model of film language contained in the semiological studies of Metz (1974) or Heath (1983). Historically, Peters' analogy derives from the work of Pudovkin (1929) as much as it appears to look forward to later developments. Indeed, the contemporary popular books on film art, to which some of these educationalists refer their more academic readers, such as Lindgren (1950) or Lawson (1964), make this clear. Both of those books describe in detail Pudovkin's notion of film syntax and visual semantics, such as his comments to the effect that:

To the poet or writer separate words are as raw material. They have the widest and most variable meanings which only begin to become precise through their position in the sentence....To the film director each shot of the finished film subserves the same purpose as the word to the poet.(Pudovkin p. 23-24)

There is an attempt here to force home the analogy with other art and language forms (the same arguments advanced by Hills, Greiner and Peters); and Lawson, for example, talks in detail about Pudovkin's

practitioner eye-view of how one creates meaning through careful attention to manipulation of mise-en-scene and editing. Both Lindgren and Lawson certainly have a model of film language, but it is one that emphasises montage as its primary mode. It is this same notion of film language that lies behind the exercises involving Mr Smith we have observed above. Pudovkin's disciplined approach to his 'craft' also implies a pedagogy, admittedly for the prospective film maker rather than the school student, which is observable thirty years later.

There may well be an analogy here between this model of film language and the *Practical Criticism* of I.A. Richards (1929) which had become standardised in English curricula of the time (see Brooker and Humm 1989). Both shared a focus on technique and effect from a broadly formalist perspective. For Richards, close reading of the text revealed the ways in which authors manipulated conventions for specific effects. His work contributed to the institutionalisation of practical criticism in examination syllabii, in which the decontextualised study of short poems or extracts was used to test students' analytical technique. Likewise, although Peters does advocate media production, his section on making films is sandwiched between 'discussion' and 'analysing'. His notion of film language implies that meaning can be equated with authorial intention and that it is primarily a result of technique - an over-deterministic and somewhat over-simplified method of textual exegesis that became all too common in the worst excesses of the 'prac. crit.' examination in English (Widdowson 1982, Brooker & Humm 1989, Doyle 1989). Likewise, Peters writes:

..the manner in which meaning is expressed deserves closer study.

There are several values the spectator should learn to appreciate. For example, he has to learn to see the difference between a disorderly construction of the action and a tight one, between a cliché and an original development of an idea. (Peters p.50).

The capacity to evaluate technique is close to the methodology advocated by the New Critics. Learning about language gives the critic the vocabulary with which he or she can distinguish between the rather subjective values listed above:

..the spectator really uses film language as the key to the world of the film maker. It is only through a knowledge of film language we can find our way in this world. (Peters p.34).

Ultimately, the theoretical stance adopted by these early media educationalists is over-determined by their desire to ratify the status of the knowledge they seek to promote. Thus, both Greiner and Peters can take refuge in the self-evidently 'scientific' status of linguistics as justification for studying dubious cultural products such as film: "seeing' can be as difficult as reading', as Peters puts it. This raises further questions about the relationships between cultural value and social definitions of literacy. The idea that one might need to *read* films as opposed to simply watching them seems to transform that common 'natural' act of watching into a higher order of cognitive understanding; and indeed going to the cinema is given the status of being able to communicate through another 'language'. This new language, we can infer, can only be understood properly by the new cultural elite, who have been taught (by film courses) how it works. In other words, we can observe here the emergent symbiotic relationship between the transformation of film into an object of high cultural status and the control and regulation of access to such cultural forms by the education system.

Progressive English and the repression of (film) grammar: the 1960's and 1970's

If film education in the 1950's and early 1960's viewed media production primarily as an opportunity to learn film grammar through exercises, this philosophy clearly had much in common with attitudes towards creative writing in English. Half a century earlier, and for similar reasons, English used the 'hard' science of linguistics as a mechanism for asserting *its* cultural value (Batsleer 1985, Green 1993). Like the early forms of University English, film studies was not to be debased by concentrating on popular pleasures. This argument is advanced in my key text from this time, a collection of essays describing courses in film at different levels in the education system edited by Whannel and Harcourt (1964), including a piece by the young Stuart Hall on film in Liberal Studies courses. I shall, however, mainly be focusing on a piece by Roy Knight, 'Film Studies and English', within that collection. This piece clearly indicates how the re-evaluation of grammar in English during the 1960's in favour of what became known as 'growth English' led to a split in Film Studies over the value of learning about film language. On the one hand, there was a focus on expression (by the film maker) and response (by the film critic) and on the other was the new science of semiology, itself derived from linguistics: this was itself further distinguished from the arid world of grammar teaching in English. (I acknowledge of course, that retrospectively, this subdivision between the semiologists and the 'old fashioned' grammarians seems far more unified by its assumptions about the determining influence of language structure than it may have done at the time.)

The writing of this period does tend to refer to media production in slightly derogatory terms as if describing some form of manual labour (see Willis (1977) for a clear distinction between the ways in which working and middle class cultures validates theoretical and practical work respectively).

Thus in their introduction Whannel and Harcourt (1964) argue that there has been 'a shift from technical explanation to critical analysis' and it is the latter which has 'developed an interest in the social role of the cinema'. However, Knight (1964) talks of film-making experiments with younger children in terms that draw upon the discourse of the Child Art movement of the 1920's and 1930's (Richardson 1948), and which clearly subordinate concern with technique to the new claims of an authentic expressiveness:

Technical studies embrace subjects as colour and lighting...the best work shows a real appreciation of both the strengths and limitations of the film medium, and even the poorest work shows genuine interest in (if not understanding of) the course followed. And the very originality of the material somehow sparks off a freshness which allied fields of study (such as literature) might find difficult to stimulate (Knight p.36).

There are a number of interesting shifts in these remarks from the earlier writing described in the preceding section and which stem in part from the ever widening aims of the state educational system. This is implied by the repertoire of 'distinction' ('best', 'real appreciation', 'poorest', 'genuine' etc.). In particular, the emphasis on motivation or stimulation seems to derive from an attempt to reach or incorporate working class children. High culture (literature) is not seen as something to be emulated, but something which might be perceived as inadequate when compared to the new media - at least in terms of its ability to inspire *these* students' motivation. Furthermore, 'interest' and 'freshness' are seen as somehow more important than 'understanding' (at least for these 'poorer' students). What validates this new aesthetic is not the values of high culture - in the way the 1950's theorists tried to make film equal to literature - but the appeal to authenticity and experience: an aesthetics of selfhood.

However, despite this kind of approbation, media production is only seen to be good enough for the child and offers little to the rational older student of film:

I do not personally believe one *has* to make films in order to appreciate the technical difficulty or enjoy the finished product.... any more than I believe one must write a novel to enjoy Jane Austen or paint pictures to enjoy or admire Rembrandt or Picasso. (Knight p. 50.)

In effect, neither progressive English nor Art really follow this approach in practice, for younger students at least: both subjects put drawing/sculpting/painting or creative writing at the heart of their curricula, and the function of such activities is not necessarily to enhance appreciation of the canon. In fact, the main reason for Knight's rejection of film-making seems to derive from his rather romanticised preference for *creativity*, at the expense of learning mundane and pedestrian *skills*:

.... technical problems arise which can create the same sort of confusion of attitude as an excessive concern with film grammar; some sort of balance must be held between the film which is accurately exposed, faultlessly shot, and painstakingly edited but which is *dead*; and the product of a promisingly rich film sense which is technically flawed at every stage that no quality emerges for judgement. (Knight p. 51.)

In other words, the primary aim of film education is to offer opportunities for the exercise of critical distinction. If making films becomes so weighed down by technical considerations that, as an activity, it conceals this objective, then what purpose does it serve? However, it is difficult to know whether this is an objection in principle or in kind: is Knight suggesting that making films is *too difficult* for students and therefore too much of a problem or is he suggesting that media production serves no pedagogic purpose? Either way, this deep-seated ambivalence - between learning

difficult skills, and expressing the film makers' vision - frequently stood in the way of media production over the next twenty years.

Yet it is a matter of some irony that the sentence which precedes the above quotation refers to cultural forms which later theorists invested with that romantic glow Knight finds so admirable, but which he cannot admit to the pantheon:

Anything that savours of playing around with a camera or uncritical indulgence in the excitements of the beach movie is likely to be not only unprofitable in terms of experience but dangerous in terms of attitude. (Knight p. 51.)

Such forms of popular media making were not redeemable by any criterion until the theorists of Youth Culture endowed them with ideological significance in the decades which followed.

The writing of the 1960's and 1970's is thus characterised by a split. On the one hand there is a continuation of the advocacy for grammatical *exercises*; and on the other a progressivist and romantic adulation of creativity. For the former we have the outline of courses like the 1971 B.F.I. film studies syllabus which soon became the I.L.E.A. General Studies sixth form course (Kitses & Kaplan 1974). This contained:

- exercises, e.g.: designing an poster, ideas for a trailer, selecting stills for display around, for example, *The Killers* (subsequently published as *The Visit* by the ILEA English Centre);
- photoplay exercises asking students to manipulate a set of still images of a demonstration in a variety of ways.'

On the other hand books like Lowndes (1968) or Gidley and Wicks (1975) emphasised the creative and expressive uses of media production as much for their own sake as for what they might teach about the media. This latter tradition has been thoroughly critiqued (Masterman 1980, Ferguson 1981) and stimulated discussion (Buckingham 1987, Stafford 1990) about the

relationship between media production and creativity; and it is to this we now turn.

Creative film-making and the repression of language: the 1960's and 1970's

For modern readers Lowndes' (1968) book, *Film Making in School*, appears to frame its argument in an oblique fashion. Nevertheless, his detailed accounts of film and photographic work undertaken at the Hornsey College of Art in North London - itself a centre for radical uprising - still convey a sense of excitement. Lowndes' starting point is that the new media in themselves offer new and different ways of seeing. The purpose of the book is:

to see how cameras, movie cameras and tape recorders can be used to extend powers of observation and comment to help young people develop an understanding of contemporary society. (Lowndes p. 9).

This modest proposal actually conceals more radical objectives: the aim is to use forms of art and media education to politicise urban youth.

Nevertheless, his argument is that although 'powers of observation and comment' are inherent qualities of the student, they can be more directly accessed and enhanced by work in media. There is thus an explicit opposition to the sterile and 'repressive' formal curriculum which stultifies those powers. Implicit, however, is the idea that thought or expression precedes language: 'the young film maker crystallises...a concept or idea which otherwise would remain ambiguous and ill defined'. Later Lowndes clarifies this separation of language from thought when he talks about:

a kind of writing children can easily do when they are not trying to construct formal sentences but merely placing lines of thought against one another. (Lowndes p. 41).

These kinds of developmental ideas were clearly in tune with the prevailing ideologies in progressivist English (see Ball *et al*, 1990). In that subject, the emphasis had steadily moved away from earlier traditions of formal grammar teaching. As Lowndes, capturing the spirit of radical progressivism, wrote of using tape recorders: 'words can be used without the barrier of grammatical organisation and writing need not be initially involved in the understanding of language'. (p.29).

Retrospectively, the weight of the argument against progressivism has mainly fallen on the ways in which it served as a way of validating middle class achievement and 'conspiring' to fail working class children, in whose interests child-centered programmes were presumed to operate (Cope and Kalantzis 1993). However, progressivism's salient theoretical critique of traditional modes of education still stands. Its political purpose was to extend and democratise educational opportunity. Thus, Lowndes argues that his classroom ideas which compare the differences between language and image as modes of communication 'can help [the student] negotiate difficulties of grammar or visual illiteracy' - which is to say that media work acts in a remedial way to counter-balance traditional literacies. Unlike Knight, Lowndes is quite clear that the curriculum should include working class children and he also makes frequent reference to New Commonwealth immigrants as part of this changing constituency. This changing definition of the clientele is part of the political aspiration of his work.

In practice, on the other hand, such an approach is open to the criticism that it is vague and subjective:

The understanding of the creative function of the editor in film making takes a great deal of time to acquire. By creative function one does not mean the ability to string together sequences...but rather the feeling for rhythm and flow that is inherent in good editing (Lowndes p.28).

As the primary domain is the aesthetic rather than the linguistic the process of film-making is characterised here in terms of the 'intuitive and expressive' - a deliberate contrast to the emphasis on technical skills I have identified in the sections above. Thus, spending time on camera and drama work is valuable because:

the student learns more about *natural camera* and the purpose of close up than ever could be provided by instruction on the formal language of camera (my italics). (Lowndes p. 49).

Contemporary critics such as Edwards & Mercer (1987) or Kalantzis & Cope (1993) have argued that this kind of experiential learning has become a substitute for the direct teaching of skills and concepts. Although they may be correct in identifying contradictions and confusion by teachers in the areas they discuss, we cannot dismiss Lowndes' approach so simply. First of all, these sorts of criticisms directed towards experiential teaching have not been made on the basis of studying the domain of the aesthetic: learning how to apply multiplication tables or write Scientific reports quite simply draw upon different competencies than learning how to use 'close-ups'. Secondly, although these criticisms may be valid where teachers are substituting 'discovery learning' for direct teaching (which equally applies to some aspects of the media curriculum) they do not account for the fact that one cannot actually teach concepts in abstraction from language. As I have argued elsewhere (Buckingham & Sefton-Green 1994), it is difficult to teach abstract concepts without access to an academic language. Such language can and should be taught as and where appropriate, but as Lowndes points out in relation to teaching 'close-ups', such teaching does not in itself lead to conceptual understanding. However appropriate criticisms of progressivist media teaching might be in relation to learning about areas such as media institutions, such criticisms are too crude when applied to ways in which we might teach young people how to make media products. I shall return to this point below.

Ferguson (1981) identifies Lowndes's work as part of a broader project to incorporate working class youth into the educational system by romanticising creativity at the expense of identifying learning (see my comments on Knight above). Ferguson argues that any pedagogy that validates students' experiences, but which appears to let the learning look after itself, effectively ignores the teacher's instructional role. In fact, Ferguson, possibly motivated by his own personal disavowal of this approach - given he had worked alongside Lowndes fifteen years earlier - likened it to 'a form of institutionalised play therapy which ignored the possibility of intellectual and cognitive skills' (p. 48). It is clear that Lowndes' pedagogic opposition to 'the formal language of camera' or 'formal sentences' directly contradicts earlier arguments for teaching film-making as a linguistic form. Equally, his approach calls into question the role of a meta-language: if one does not teach the 'formal language of camera', then in what ways can one describe how film communicates? There is thus an impasse: if this approach to media production extends media literacy in an expressive dimension, then it seems to deny the axis of linguistic organisation - just as the work of the 'film grammarians' appears to do the opposite. Media production by young people, it seems, can either be expressive or linguistic, but cannot justify itself from both perspectives at the same time. We shall return to this unnecessary polarisation below.

It is worth noting that despite this apparent theoretical contradiction, Lowndes' book and subsequent publications of this period (including Ferguson's own contemporaneous 1969 work) do advocate an inventive range of film-making activities. Indeed, the practical impetus that such work gave to curriculum development should not be underestimated. Many of Lowndes's suggestions revolve around the 'translation' between word and image, starting with words and finding ways to represent them visually. Similarly sequencing exercises are described which seek to develop understanding of narrative. Likewise many of the contributors to Gidley

and Wicks' (1975) suggest classroom projects involving still and moving images, sequencing or cutting up film stock. Evidence from the classroom in these texts (albeit largely anecdotal) describes fully fledged productions as well as these kinds of exercises.

Although the broad emphasis here is on expressive media work, the frequent use of a term like 'exercises' and the reference to short, discrete activities does continue to reflect the idea of learning a language. Norris (1975), for example, talks in detail about preparing shooting scripts: he wants children to sketch out camera positions in order that they can 'bring to bear all their understanding of film language and form that they have acquired during their course of film study'. This is in order that they do not merely 'produce.... a script where each shot merely represents a stage in the development of the story, like the pictures in a strip cartoon'. As for Pudovkin, there seems to be an emphasis here on the need for students to 'learn the language' of film in a structured and disciplined way.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the practical film work of this period was based on several contradictory models of language learning which indicate the tensions inherent in definitions of literacy at the time. The older skills- based approach, which paid detailed attention to the construction of film grammar, was counterposed to a notion of film-making as an expressive and communicative process. Whereas the film grammarians were to an extent recuperated by the deconstructionists in the late 1970's, the expressive approach also manifested itself in a concern with film-making as a means of learning social skills which resurfaced in the 1970's and 1980's.

Media production as social education and youth culture: the 1970's and early 1980's

Possibly in response to anxieties around delinquent youth (Hall and Jefferson 1976) and prefiguring the new vocationalism of the 1980's (Bates *et al* 1984), the 1970's saw the teaching of 'social skills' become an educational aim in its own right. 'Social skills' have been defined as 'all of those skills which facilitate effective relationships in groups' (Lorac and Weiss 1981 p. 11) and include a host of individual competencies (for example, being able to put forward ideas and accept them being rejected) as well as the capacity to act effectively in groups and interpersonally. Defining social behaviour in terms of 'skills' is of course problematic. It begs the question of how 'skills' are defined in the first place; especially in the context of schooling, where many other kinds of 'skills', such as spelling or multiplication, are taught and assessed. Secondly it requires us to define how, and by whom, social skills might be defined; how they might be organised and assessed. Finally, it raises political questions about the moral purposes of education: in what ways should it be the function of schools to produce certain kinds of well behaved citizens (CCCS 1981)? Nevertheless, despite debate about the political purpose of this 'social' curriculum, the 1970's saw school subjects developing an explicit emphasis on social and communication skills (for a critique of this history in the subject of Drama see Hornbrook 1989).

The growth of media production - especially video work - with young people identified Media Studies as a subject conducive for the delivery of these general educational aims. I have already noted in my discussion of Lowndes above, how the subject's changing attempts to meet the concerns of inner city youth inflected its subject content; and coupled with this orientation towards the inherent value of group work, it can be argued that the status of media production began to change. The development of a

Schools Council project in 1976, published as *Communication and Social Skills* (Lorac and Weiss 1981), exploring the use of group media production (especially video) in the curriculum further cemented this process. It must be noted, however, that the development of media production in this context may have had the effect of defining it as a suitable subject for those young people deemed in need of a social skills curriculum (Ferguson 1981). In effect then, Media Studies and media production spread in popularity, but this may well have been at the cost of associating the subject with problem 'youth' and a social skills curriculum.

Lorac and Weiss (1981) provide a through description of a variety of ways in which group media production could be used in a wide range of curriculum areas, including Media Studies. They focus on the ways in which such activities develop communication and social skills and make the case that video production, rather than being a specialised activity (in that few people would realistically use film making in their professional or later lives), served *general* educational aims. In addition the report's recommendations do pay attention to the linguistic dimension. It suggests that media production across the curriculum serves a unique pedagogic purpose; in that it allows teachers the opportunity to work with young people in such a way that teachers can diagnose students 'particular learning difficulties and strengths'. Secondly, a production curriculum facilitates a number of opportunities for students not only to *develop* a range of communication skills, but also to *reflect upon* the nature of communication itself. Thirdly it suggests that working in media languages - it calls them an 'audio visual' language - 'bypasses literacy difficulties....offer[ing] .. the sorting power of language but in way that is not so dependent on conventional literacy' (Lorac and Weiss 1981 p178).

The notion of using media production to learn about communication in general clearly moves such activity much more centrally into a media curriculum. I will return to the question of how production might facilitate

reflection throughout this thesis. However, the distinction between audio-visual language and conventional literacy is unfortunate because it suggests a hierarchy of literacies. In effect, the project's attention to social skills, which as I have argued carries connotations of remediation and deficient youth, suggests that an 'audio-visual language' might be tainted with the same brush. In other words, a net effect of the report was to imply that media production was more appropriate for those students who could not operate in print-literacy. There is almost then, a notion of media production being a form of language teaching, of offering insight into communication at a number of levels; but the circumscribed social status of an audio-visual language sets clear limits for the value of such work.

Lorac and Weiss' study is firmly set within the school curriculum but media production by young people was also increasingly taking place out of school. Here, a concern with 'youth' was framed not so much in terms of educational deficit, but of cultural difference. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the work at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies challenged conventional definitions of cultural production by young people. This attention to the expressive forms of youth culture inevitably challenged the purpose of media production within the subject of Media Studies. It also influenced the development of a complementary kind of media education within the informal education sector, which despite severe cut backs in provision for young people over the last decade (see Griffin 1993), has been an important area where young people have had the opportunity to become media producers.

In the introduction to *Youth, Culture and Photography* (1988), Dewdney and Lister describe 'the praxis' of this kind of media education in terms of such an institutional position, 'part time work in schools, youth clubs and adventure playgrounds' - and cultural politics - 'a critique of art education'. This work attempted to shift the attention from form, pre-eminent in the deconstructionist approach (see below), to content, through a

focus on 'real life experience: 'We've tried to stay close to the real, uneven, and 'never settled' experience of working with resistant young people' (p. 2). The authors directly attack the practice of art education in schools; and to an extent, the 'mechanical' nature of mass media production is seen as part of a wider project to undermine the institutions of High Art with their attendant values of dexterity and manual skill (see the discussion of Willis 1990 in the following chapter).

Dewdney and Lister's attempt to articulate the experience of 'resistant young people' also makes explicit one of the submerged themes in our discussion so far: namely the ways in which the objects of media education has been cast in terms of the mass audience and the working class child. Although we might situate Lowndes' approach to working class and Black children within an active debate about representation in the media (e.g. Hall *et al* 1978), it is also part of a larger educational emphasis on equality of opportunity. As I have suggested, Dewdney and Lister's position derives more from the work of the Birmingham Centre and in particular from ideas about youth and resistance (see Hall and Jefferson 1976). Part of the way in which subcultural theorists such as Hebdige (1979) described resistance was in terms of a signifying practices, such as music and dress. This therefore, implies that the process of signifying rebellion is itself conceptualised as a form of cultural competence: in order to show signs of resistance, youth had to be able to operate in the cultural sphere. Furthermore, resistance within education was argued to have a political purpose, most notably in Willis' (1977) study *Learning to Labour*. This validation of resistance to pedagogic intervention thus threw into question the place and purpose of teaching with supposedly political intentions - in direct contrast to the emphasis on social skills discussed above.

In Dewdney and Lister's version of media production work with young people, academic knowledge is explicitly weighted against alternative

forms of 'cultural practice, production and process'(p.6). They deliberately set out to 'make young people's cultures the content of schoolwork' and to validate 'the concerns and currencies of their own worlds' (p.7). They differentiate this approach from what they perceive as dominant practice in the Media Studies of the period (late 1970's early 1980's) on three levels. First it is argued that if 'young people ...learn to decode dominant media messages byencoding their own ...they should of right be able to encode the meanings that they chose' (p.7). Secondly, 'this process should be taken seriously as expressive and educational work in its own right'(p.7). Both of these arguments are explicitly balanced against their third point of difference: that Media Studies had become incorporated into dominant academic forms of knowledge production and thereby become 'schematic and didactic' in its pedagogy.

Several interesting contradictions emerge from their discussion of this work. First of all, the authors genuinely struggle to account for the role of the teacher and the educational nature of the transactions taking place. They clearly acknowledge that validating young people's creativity is, of itself, an inadequate intervention by adults who 'know more' than their students. This dilemma revolves partially around the question of technical knowledge: that is, how and in what ways to teach students to use the equipment without unduly biasing their use of it. Again, in contrast with Lorac and Weiss, the notion of a 'skill' is a politically loaded term here, which ten years later than the Schools Council project, is partially attributable to the attempts by the left to resist the appropriation of such concepts by the Thatcherite right. However, the problem for Dewdney and Lister is that the absence of any terminology with which one can evaluate media production leaves a vacuum: as if any such discourse might impinge on students' culture. Although the authors confidently assert that it is 'social rather than technical criteria which dominate the [production] process' (p.50), their exemplification does not entirely support this. For

example, they suggest in a discussion of photography that ‘unless instructed students will not select the *best* exposed negative to print but the image they have most interest in’ (my emphasis) (p.50). In this way, they try to appeal to common social values in order to circumvent the need for a pedagogic intervention: meaning, they seem to be implying, is the product of social expression and not the result of manipulating technical codes or conventions. Ultimately, these authors may be forced into this opposition where perhaps none exists. Retrospectively, they can be seen to be wanting to hold onto the aesthetic (‘*best* exposed negatives’) and to the idea of artistic skill without acknowledging the discursive history of these values.

A second level of contradiction here emerges in their attitude to intervention by the teacher. Dewdney and Lister do acknowledge the problematic nature of certain youth cultures; and that the politics of representation can work in repressive ways. Yet they do not wish to impose their academic or aesthetic values on the creations of young people. It therefore becomes quite difficult to devise activities which ‘teach’ young people either how to use equipment or how to engage with alternative representations. Putting students’ culture at the heart of the process clearly gives rise to problems, particularly when that culture is racist or sexist in ways that might ‘resist’ the teacherly, but also when young people are also in effect supporting dominant ideologies. Thus the projects on self-image, peers or neighbourhood might be centered on young people’s cultures, but do no more than reproduce problematic representations of their lives, both for themselves and other audiences. To their credit, these are problems that the authors address as such: they do not suggest facile answers or try to avoid these issues.

In this respect, the authors’ reflexive approach is very different from the deconstructionist work they critique so strongly; Dewdney and Lister’s book is *un*-typical of work in this field (see Chapter 4 Buckingham *et al* 1995). Nevertheless, their account is in some ways caught between the

fundamental contradictions - between skills-learning, critical understanding and self-expression - that have lain beneath the surface of my history of the period.

Deconstruction: the legacy of the 1970's.

As I have suggested in the Film Studies work of the 1950's and 1960s these contradictions can almost be read in terms of a schematic binary opposition. On the one hand we have an emphasis on linguistic determinism with a corresponding pedagogy of 'grammar' teaching (Peters); on the other we have a focus on the aesthetic and a pedagogy of experientialism (Lowndes). The former position emphasises structure, the latter agency. To an extent my analysis of Media Studies within the formal educational sector in the 1970's and 1980's recapitulates and mirrors these oppositions, although they are inflected in different ways. The linguists found their purest expression in deconstruction whilst the progressivist position, I have suggested, was most eagerly adopted by those working with young people in informal education.

The strongest influence at work in the institutionalisation of Media Studies in the 1980's (Masterman 1980, 1985) was the application of deconstruction techniques to media texts. As has been argued (Lusted 1986; Buckingham 1986, 1987), the model of media education which deployed these techniques emphasised the rationalistic, objective and intellectual at the expense of the subjective and pleasurable. Forms of semiotic or linguistic analysis were seen to empower or liberate working class students, for explicitly political ends. Analytic exercises based on Barthes' threefold approach (Barthes 1977), as in the British Film Institute's *Reading Pictures* teaching pack for example, provided a rationalistic model of teaching and learning about the media that was only

thoroughly called into question by the empirical studies in Buckingham (1990). This emphasis on reading and analytical techniques did in effect prioritise the linguistic dimension. The notion of 'the languages of the media' thus became one of the central metaphors of the subject.

Yet whilst *reading* the media - and indeed *changing* students' readings - was axiomatic here, the idea of *writing* was absent from theories of the period. References to media production from this time now read pejoratively. Len Masterman's (1980) influential book, *Teaching about Television*, is scathing about students' media productions. His description of media production as an 'endless wilderness of dreary third rate imitative "pop" shows'(p.140) seems to echo the earlier left-Leavisite comments, quoted above, about 'beach movies'. By contrast, much of the emphasis in the book is on practical 'deconstruction exercises' which explicitly facilitate analysis of the dominant 'codes' of television: '[deconstruction] allows individual conventions (of framing, camera positioning, editing, etc.) to be isolated, experimented with and broken while variations in their meaning are explored'. Thus, it is suggested that students might undertake exercises on the conventions of TV interviews or news presentation; or they might be required to produce 'exercises in style' designed to demonstrate their understanding of a particular genre such as film noir or horror. (Interestingly enough, in the context of parallels between media education and English, Masterman's description of this kind of work explicitly referred to Lunzer and Gardners' (1979) *The Act of Reading*: Masterman 1980 p. 26. and footnote.)

Masterman placed particular emphasis on the study of factual genres, which was one of the changes of emphasis between Television Studies and Film Studies. However, this raises similar questions to those raised by Genre theorists in relation to writing in English (e.g. Kress 1992, Cope and Kalantzis 1993). The discussion there has often revolved around the ways in which an emphasis on creative writing (i.e. fictional genres) has

been to the detriment of students learning to write factual genres. Likewise for Masterman, the central objective is to get students to understand the codes and conventions of news and other factual genres, which is of course very different from the focus on fictional genres in previous eras. However, this change of emphasis was not without its problems. On one level it is of course paradoxical to require students to *make up* the content of factual genres, which is after all what making news programmes comes down to; but even if we were to accept this as a means of teaching the relevant conventions, these kinds of exercises clearly do seek to put the student at a distance from the material and thus deny opportunities for expressive work. Where fictional works are discussed, it was to the Continental *avant garde* which was to be the implicit model for such work - and not popular cinema as was presumed by earlier writers. Thus, Ferguson (1981) advocates 'encouraging students to manipulate televisual or filmic language for a *specific purpose*....not to express oneself, but to manufacture a meaning through the conscious manipulation of production techniques and norms'. The potential for expression here seems almost 'repressed'.

This emphasis was certainly very influential on early GCSE and A-level syllabi, and gave rise to very difficult demands on students. In those syllabi students are often required to make media products that are explicitly 'alternative' or 'oppositional': films which subvert Hollywood styles of realist narrative, anti-advertisements and so on (see Fraser forthcoming; Buckingham et al 1995). The difficulty is that these complex tasks are often where students are expected to *begin* their experience of media production; whereas in subjects like Art or English such oppositional texts would be much more likely to be undertaken as advanced work. One significant problem here, however, is in identifying precisely what form this 'oppositional' practice might take. While Masterman and Ferguson were highly critical of contemporary practice, they provide very little evidence of how their alternative suggestions might actually be implemented. Unlike

the work of Peters or Lowndes, there is a sense in which these arguments are inadequately grounded in the realities of classroom practice.

Ultimately, the 'deconstructionist' movement tended to emphasise the understanding of a critical *meta-language* more than demonstrating proficiency in the *languages* of the media themselves. In other words, students were encouraged to learn terms like 'denotation', 'connotation', 'anchorage' etc. rather than to immerse themselves in film making projects. This meta-language clearly belongs to a level of academic discourse which thus serves to legitimate the status of knowledge about the media. Conversely, being a fluent media producer cannot allow one to claim the same academic status. Making media products is thus paradoxically given a lower status than academic media criticism, a weighting that is evident in most Media Studies syllabii.

In a way, this imbalance between the reflexive and the expressive repeats the argument of previous decades between film grammarians and progressive English teachers. The difference here is that in the early models, such as Pudovkin, only the film makers had to know the language, the readers did not. By contrast the implication for deconstructionists is that consumers of the mass media needed to be educated in order to learn how to read and make critical sense of these products. It was therefore particularly controversial when some empirical audience studies (e.g. Morley 1980; Ang 1985) increasingly began to argue the opposite: that audiences may often be more 'naturally' critical - or at the least resistant to 'dominant ideologies' - than had been assumed (see Fiske 1987).

Media production in Media Studies: the institutional dilemmas of the 1980's and 1990's

Finally, I wish to concentrate on the models of media production within the subject Media Studies at the moment. I will be returning to many of these issues in more detail in the following chapters, but it is worthwhile delineating the central questions at this stage. In effect, the fundamental tensions I have identified in my history of the subject - between grammar and self-expression, between an attention to the teaching and learning of production skills and critical understanding - continue to be manifested in contemporary practices and debates. Yet, despite this history and the amount of media production produced by young people over the last forty years, the current emphasis in contemporary Media Studies syllabi is most heavily influenced by the deconstructionist approach.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, most Media Studies syllabi at GCSE and A-level require students to undertake some kind of media production. Despite this being a compulsory element, the actual requirements are often broadly defined. Students may work alone or in groups. Assignments are frequently set by the teacher, but they may also be negotiated by students. They may be limited exercises or involve fully fledged film making requiring the completion of 'real' texts, from adverts to short films. In some syllabi production skills may be rewarded, whilst in others the actual product is subordinate to an interest in the train of ideas observed during the production process. In some institutions production methods are explicitly taught: in others the media technology is either limited or left for the student to play around with. All of these options are possible because media production is still fulfilling the diverse and contradictory purposes it has served over the last forty years.

In addition there are a number of institutional and political factors affecting opportunities for production. For example, a reluctance to

foreground media production in syllabus design is directly related to the financing of schools: media production necessarily involves the ownership and maintenance of media technology; but it has been difficult for examination boards to specify minimum course resources within a period of decreasing school budgets.

Secondly, there has been a considerable amount of concern not to mis-represent the media production element in Media Studies as a form of vocational training, given that students often identify examination choices at 16 + and 18+ with career ambitions. The apparent increase of work related opportunities in the media and cultural industries (Skillset 1996: Arts Council 1997) in comparison to say, the film industry of the 1950's has led to an even greater emphasis on the practical elements of media education.

Buckingham (1987) identifies a conceptual divide between training and education, suggesting that the 'new vocationalism' (Bates *et al* 1984) poses a threat to the critical tradition of the subject (see above for a discussion of similar ways that the BFI curriculum statements negotiated this tension). Buckingham's concern is that media production will be used simply to teach technical skills. It may be, however, that this concern is merely the contemporary manifestation of an ongoing debate about the relationship between 'skills and 'creativity', as we have seen in the writing of Peters and Knight. As I have argued, and as I will continue to discuss in my research, it does not follow that teaching technical skills *necessarily* fulfils a narrowly instrumental function. On the other hand, the relationship between teaching skills and developing students' expressive abilities is far from straightforward: this is a central theme in my research.

Although this anxiety about the subject's vocational, or as Buckingham (1995) suggests, 'pre-vocational', content remain, to a great extent such fears have not been realised. There has not been a substantial attempt to make the acquisition of practical production skills an end in

itself within media curricula, except possibly in some of the vocational 16+ courses such as the City and Guilds video production unit and the new GNVQ's in Media and Communication. This is despite the existence of units at A-level which stress progression between media production units⁶. However the reasonable desire not to create false expectations about possible career paths for media students has acted in a negative fashion: defining what media production is *not*, is rather a weak way of making a positive argument.

Yet the critical tradition of the subject, discussed in the section above, has found it equally difficult to identify the purposes of media production. I suggested in the preceding section that, at best, media production came to be seen as a means of acquiring a critical discourse within the deconstructionist tradition. However, I want to suggest here that the particular assessment arrangements for media production found in most syllabi actually make this objective difficult to achieve. Indeed, the difficulties of assessing media production for public examination within the specialist discipline of Media Studies have exerted considerable influence on how media production has developed in practice. Partly due to the lack of specialist training available to teachers of Media Studies (see Dickson 1994) and partly due to the disavowal of the discourse of values associated with liberal humanism, media teachers have found it difficult to find a language and a process through which media production can be formally assessed, (see Fraser forthcoming). This has, in turn impacted back on day-to-day evaluations of media production. In my experience as an A-level examiner and in-service training I would concur with Fraser that it is very rare to find media teachers evaluating production skills. From this point of view then, the expressive function of media production has rather foundered.

⁶ At the time the research reported in this thesis was carried out (1992), the Cambridge B syllabus included two media production units, a 'basic' and 'advanced' production module. It was specified that there should be progression between the two units but the nature of the progression was left unclear. However, given that students were required to work in different media in each unit, it was difficult to interpret the syllabus as requiring any notion of developing technical competence between the modules.

Without a strong tradition of shared evaluative criteria, it has proven difficult to make the case for expressive media production in its own right.

This problem of how to evaluate media production has led both GCSE and A-level syllabi to establish complex assessment mechanisms that focus attention on the written accounts (or 'logs') of media production that are required to accompany them (Grahame 1990, Buckingham & Sefton-Green 1992). I shall return to the details of this problem in the case studies (Chapters 5 to 7). As a model of working the log has distinct advantages and some costs. There are, as we will see in more detail, some valuable dialogues within and between students as they reflect on the production process. However, the written account may also act as a way of displacing attention from any aesthetic judgement on the part of teacher or student - it is not a simple guarantor of critical understanding. I shall return to this relationship between critical reflection and media production, especially in Chapter seven, but it is important to note here that it provides a clear example how the institutional development of the subject has determined its educational aims. The log may make the task of the examiner more straightforward, but it may also obscure important questions about students' learning. It is not the simple vantage point into media production, as has so often been claimed.

Conclusion

On a theoretical level, the polarisation between the linguistic and the expressive which I have argued underpins the role of media production within the recent history of media education has led to bitter debate (see the exchange between Buckingham and Masterman in *Screen* 1986). Although this debate has been fuelled by political and ideological passion (Ferguson 1981), it has only led to futile position-taking. Much energy has

been put into 'proving' the other side wrong (whatever that might mean) at the expense of observing or working with children and teachers. However, it seems quite clear that these oppositions are merely repeating themselves. The pendulum swung from the linguistic to the aesthetic in the 1960's and has swung back and forth again in the subsequent decades. The growth of Media Studies examinations cemented the linguistic model of media production but this may be largely due to the fact that such a model is much simpler to incorporate in an assessment-driven notion of the curriculum, in that one can assess 'right' or 'wrong' (grammatical or inaccurate) uses of language. Meanwhile, the growing body of research into media classrooms would indicate that students value the opportunity to make media productions primarily because such activities give them access to cultural and expressive resources (Buckingham 1990; Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett 1992).

On the other hand, as this research makes clear, the *practice* of media education is a great deal more contradictory and contingent than the rather schematic discussion contained in this chapter might indicate. In reality many media productions contain elements of the linguistic exercise *and* of cultural expression. Teachers will move between 'skilling' activities and more open ended 'free choice' productions. The constraints and opportunities provided by simulations and project briefs are often integrated with direct teaching and experimentation (see Buckingham & Sefton-Green 1994; Buckingham *et al* 1995). In this respect, it seems important to recall that the *ideas* discussed above do not necessarily translate directly into classroom practice in the ways the authors themselves may imagine, and as we shall observe in Chapters five to seven.

Finally I want to make explicit the implicit metaphor within this history: namely, the concept of media literacy . This concept, and at times the term itself, haunts the forgoing discussion in many suggestive ways. There is much in this history which implies that media production can fulfil

a similar role to writing within the making of 'media literacy'. Indeed, just as theories of teaching and learning *language* have swung between a recognition of implicit processes and an emphasis on explicit knowledge so have the theories of learning underlying media production over this period. In itself, this has already begun to contextualise the process of making media as a *form of literacy*. Yet literacy, especially in the expanded sense I am implying, is a complex term and requires a full discussion in its own right. This will be the substance of the next chapter.

From reading the media to writing the media: the metaphor of literacy.

As was suggested at the end of the last chapter, the significant question raised by the foregoing consideration of media production is that of media literacy: to what extent can expressing or communicating in media forms be seen as part of a range of contemporary literacies?

In a review of research in literacy studies Barton (1994) identifies three crucial dimensions of the term: literacy, he suggests, is:

a set of *social practices* associated with particular *symbol systems and their related technologies*. To be literate is to be *active*; it is to be *confident* within these practices. (p. 32 my emphasis)

Media production I will be arguing can embody each of these dimension. It seems to utilise a concept of linguistic and semiotic structure - the 'languages of the media' - or what Barton calls 'particular symbol systems and their related technologies'. Secondly, it allows for the idea of human agency - that is individual or cultural expression; Barton's notion of being active and confident. Thirdly, it is grounded within specific 'social practices' and events: it takes place within social, economic and cultural frameworks. As the last chapter suggested, it is only relatively recently that the activity of media production in education has begun to synthesise these aspects in ways that might make any claim to *literacy teaching* at all pertinent. If we are to develop this analogy between writing and making media, we will need to conceptualise literacy both as a set of individual competencies (practical and intellectual) and as social or cultural actions. This requires us to review the theoretical relationship between models of writing and literacy which is the task of this chapter.

Although the phrase 'media literacy' has been in common circulation since the 1960's (McLuhan 1962) it has not featured highly in educational rationales for media production either within media education courses or books about the subject. It does not feature in either of the B.F.I. Curriculum statements (Bazalgette 1989, Bowker 1991), for example. However, it is frequently used in Canada and the U.S.A. in similar contexts (see Aufderheide 1997, Hobbs 1997). Whilst this may not in itself be important, and may merely be symptomatic of the different discourses in educational politics on different sides of the Atlantic, it may hint at an important denial in this country of the relationship between the broad experiences of participating in a common culture and the individual competencies required for that participation. After all, the term 'literacy' is more frequently used to suggest the competencies required to make sense of a 'cultural heritage' (Cox 1990): schools need to make students literate in order that they will be able to read the works of Shakespeare etc. (see Jones 1992 for a critique of this argument, that such an approach can equip students for 'life'). The idea of visual literacy, as we will explore later, was more commonly used by media educationalists in the seventies and eighties in order to both echo and subvert such an argument. Using the term made a statement of position in relation to the wider functions of education; and in particular it sounded controversial in debates about culture. As we will explore later, one of the problems with all discussions of literacy is that they evoke other frames and discourses, especially where the term is more frequently used to describe a restricted notion of reading and writing print texts.

However *reading* the media is a term commonly used by both academics and teachers; and reading is clearly a significant facet of literacy. Indeed the wider application of the process of reading from decoding print to decoding visual and aural media is now so commonplace as to make it almost impossible to trace the origin of the idea. Most probably, however,

the use of the term in this context derives from the influence of semiology on Media and Cultural Studies in the 1960's and 70's (see for example Coward and Ellis 1977, or Barthes 1984). Saussure's (1974) ambition to develop 'a science that studies the life of signs within society' clearly implies that the paradigms of linguistic analysis were transferable to other media. For example both the title of Barthes' (1977) famous essay 'The Rhetoric of the Image' as well its content, where he performs an analysis of 'the linguistic message' of pictures, draws attention to this dimension of reading the visual. It is more than just semantics to point out, after Barton (1994), that using a term like 'reading' thus implies a theory of literacy (from which the notion of reading must itself derive).

There are, therefore, several assumptions in the common use of terms like 'reading' and 'literacy' and we need to begin by disentangling them. First of all we need to define the relationship between literacy and language and then explore the interrelationships between reading and writing as part of any definition of literacy. We need then to map this argument back onto the idea of media languages and thence back to media literacy. These arguments take up the first part of this chapter. I then go on to pursue in more detail discussion around theories of writing and writing instruction. Finally theories of cultural production by young people are considered as a means of leading into a statement of my research questions. This chapter thus consists of a selective review of different fields of enquiry which I attempt to draw together in order that I can formulate a thesis for empirical investigation in Chapters Four to Seven.

From literacy to literacies

Barton (1994) has argued that the idea of literacy now encompasses a range of meanings:

Across a range of disciplines the term **literacy** has become a code word for more complex views of what is involved in reading and writing (p.5 original emphasis)

This is partly due to the multi-disciplinary nature of work in the field of literacy studies but more importantly because of the coded ways in which the possession of literacy (in whatever field) is seen to possess a *value*. The value may be political (Freire and Macedo 1987), economic (Bourdieu, 1977) or educational (Meek 1991) or variations within these and other fields. Etymologically the value of literacy lies in its negation of its opposite, illiteracy, which indeed is how the concept seems to have entered the language (Willinsky 1990). The value of literacy thus either lies in what its possession will do for its owner in *social* terms, or, and this is the second main sphere of the word's usage, in *psychological* terms. Here literacy is defined as a quality of intellectual and cognitive ability.

Street (1984) in a well known formulation, has identified two approaches to the subject: 'ideological' and 'autonomous'. The former describes uses of the term where the definition of literacy is explicitly dependent on different social or ideological situations; while the latter implies that definitions of literacy can be generalised away from social contexts in a more neutral formulation. It is perhaps more in the 'ideological' tradition that terms like 'computer literacy', 'visual literacy' or 'media literacy' have been used, where they tend to mean 'competent or knowledgeable in specialised areas' (Barton 1994: 19). However, the idea of *competence* also raises the question of *skills*. This is one of the most contentious aspects in autonomous approaches to the field, exemplified by

recent political debates about the de-contextualised teaching of reading and writing, especially the role of phonics in the teaching of reading (e.g. Carter 1990).

Yet being literate is not a state of being; it is something one becomes. The term therefore heavily implies a notion of intellectual *development* and a concomitant focus on the *acquisition* of literacy. Here much research has concentrated on the development of early reading and writing skills. In particular the complex interrelationships between home, school and social context have been emphasised (e.g. Stubbs 1980, Heath 1983). What has emerged from much of this research is the complex ways in which language use is interconnected with the learning of literacies. Thus attention to the registers, genres (Cope and Kalantzis 1993) and discourses (Gee 1996) of language use, the multilingual (e.g. Burgess 1984), gendered (e.g. Moss 1989) and unequally distributed nature of literacies, and the various configurations of language, written and spoken (see Chapter Six in Barton 1994) have all contributed to a pluralist model of literacy.

The salient feature of this model is that it defines literacy in the plural, as *literacies*: just as language is itself a social practice, so literacies can be best described 'in terms of broader social relations' (Barton 1994). Following Scribner and Cole (1981) Barton goes on to develop a 'practice account' of literacy, talking in terms of 'different literacies ..associated with different domains of life'(p.34). These are socially situated and have specific institutional locations. He draws upon Heath's (1983) idea of social, historical and individual 'literacy events' but integrates this emphasis with the psychological dimension: 'literacy is a symbolic system of representing the world to ourselves. Literacy is part of our thinking'(p.35).

However, the discussion so far has considered the practice of literacy in general, whereas practising literacies actually means engaging in the more specific activities of language use: reading and writing. Yet few literacy theorists crudely weight or order the component parts, as it were,

of the process. Thus although reading and writing are conceptualised together in opposition to orality (Ong 1982), they are usually seen as two sides of the same coin rather than as discrete entities or processes in relation to one another. This only really becomes an issue in the context of our enquiry because the literacy paradigm underlying the idea of 'reading' the media can be so easily integrated into the pluralist notion of literacies described above. Hodge & Tripp (1986) and Buckingham (1993), for example, employ a developmental notion of learning to read the media, in this case television, which utilises the ideas of literacy practices and situates reading within a holistic account of the social and the psychological.

Nevertheless, I am proposing that it remains a potentially 'weak' argument¹ to develop the idea of *reading* the media into a fully fledged notion of 'media literacy' unless the concept of *writing* the media comes into play. Yet consideration of such a development is substantially absent from most accounts of media literacy. In conventional discussions of literacy, reading and writing are frequently described as requiring fundamentally separate approaches (e.g. Graves 1983; Meek 1991), whereas it is not immediately obvious what 'writing the media' might mean or be. Certainly it is rarely considered as part of a holistic notion of media literacy which might encompass both 'reading' and 'writing'. Of course, a superficial application of the literacy metaphor to the media runs into problems straight away. We are not all media producers even if we are all media readers. Making media products - certainly on the part of professional media industries - is more often than not a collaborative enterprise, not an individualistic process of thought and expression (a notable exception being snapshot photography). In developmental terms learning to write is inextricably bound up with learning to read; not so with the media.

¹ There is no intention to sound pejorative here. Attempts to argue for media literacy perform wider social functions in terms of widening the concept of literacy in general (Davies 1989).

Besides objections like these it could also be argued that, just as literacy is counterposed with orality, so reading and writing depend on, and involve, talk. Even more significantly many accounts of language are contingent on a relationship with thought. The work of Vygotsky (1962) is most influential here. Vygotsky argued that conceptual understanding, particularly of the more advanced kind, is bound up with language acquisition and development. Reading and writing the media don't quite make sense in this respect. This relationship between talk and thought cannot easily be mapped back onto media literacy. Of course there are important criticisms of Vygotsky's emphasis on the primacy of the linguistic and intellectual, which we shall return to below: but this perspective still raises the question of what 'writing the media' might be and how a definition of it might impact back upon the metaphor of media literacy itself. Initially, therefore, throwing writing into the equation would seem to raise more questions than it answers.

The language of the media

If we are 'literate' when we 'read' the media, then what is the specific nature of the 'language' of the media in the first place? Research on this issue tends to derive from two traditions whose common ground is structuralist semiotics: those of film theory and of visual literacy.

First of all, however, it is worth emphasising that there is no media *lingua franca*, no single language that functions across all aspects of the mass media. The mass media themselves employ a variety of languages. This is a basic but obvious point. Reading newspapers is qualitatively different from reading television news even if the 'content' were to be the same. There is thus a specific continuum of literacies across the media crucially dependent on the relationship between text based and aural and/or

visual codes. This might indicate that we should remain sceptical about any claims for an all-inclusive notion of *media* literacy. Indeed such a question also poses the almost banal consideration as to what counts as *media* in this context in the first place.

This important reservation must however be contextualised in the light of the principles discussed above, that literacies are socially and institutionally located and are exercised within a temporal dimension - as 'literacy events'. In this respect the spectrum of media languages can all be collapsed into one because *reading the media* is more than just interpreting the particular linguistic code in operation in any one media artefact. Not only might we learn to work across the different *modes* (visual, moving image, text based, aural) of media forms simultaneously but readers also to learn to recognise that the mode of any one specific medium is less determining than the event in which it occurs. As for example, the plethora of discussions about advertising can testify, even analyses of different media languages in operation in adverts acknowledge that reading adverts implies both reading the many languages of the media as well as the *Language of Advertising* specifically. This is evident from the changes in critical perspective between Williamson (1978) and Cook (1992) and illustrates the plurality of reading competencies now acknowledged in the analysis of reading advertisements². Nevertheless the particularities of the linguistic codes across differing media are discrete and may need learning about medium by medium.

The work of Metz (1974) is often cited here, though this is perhaps ironic given that his most influential essay 'The Cinema: Language or Language System', apparently sets out to critique the much more straightforward model of cinema language used by earlier theorists such as Eisenstein or Pudovkin. Metz explicitly rejects any simple equation between

² Cook (1992) stresses the active role the reader plays in interpreting adverts whereas Williamson (1978) stresses how the reader is manipulated and positioned by the language of advertising.

film and language. First it worth noting what Metz does not say. He does not talk about *writing* film language, only *reading* it. Secondly, although he might speculate about film language, he does not in any way offer a theory of *literacy*. Saussure or Barthes, his semiotic influences, postulate a description of how language might work in abstract terms, but their work does not acknowledge the role of literacy in the actual social and historical uses of language. Equally Metz does not offer thoughts on how film might be read by individuals in specific contexts: his work is intended as a philosophic argument about the *prima facie* philosophical possibilities of describing film as language.

Metz's initial argument is with exponents of montage - what he calls the 'montage or bust' theory - and is revealing on a number of levels. His prime interest is in applying Saussure's ideas of *langue* and *parole* to film. It is important to note therefore that his application explicitly rejects common sense ideas of 'film language' - where montage represents a way of manipulating images like words. Indeed this more mechanical formulation is best expressed by Pudovkin's (1929) dictum: 'to the film director each shot of the film subserves the same purpose as the word to the writer'. As Heath (1983) argues, Soviet cinema of that time may in fact have utilised a more social theory of language in common with Bakhtin, Volosinov or Vygotsky (see Morris 1994) as exemplified in the discussion of the so-called 'Kuleshov effect', where the same images of an actor looking straight at camera were cut against different images of war or romance and his mood was interpreted according to the context he appeared in. This was taken to prove that film audiences understood film language - in the sense that to be literate, they had to understand the process which placed one image against the next - i.e. montage editing. From this later perspective the meaning of images is firmly located within the specific interpretations historical audiences can provide at specific times. In other words the language of

Soviet cinema is only made meaningful by the activity of 'literate' audiences.

However, Metz's work critiques this earlier model of language and literacy. His argument is that 'cinema is a language above and beyond any particular effect of montage'; 'cinema is a language without a system'. It is the Saussurean *langage* but without a *langue*. There is thus a correspondence between the filmic image and speech, 'the shot is a kind of 'sentence-word'. He reduces image to speech (i.e. *parole*) but on the other hand denies that editing equates with syntax.

Metz's work has been immensely suggestive but as has been often pointed out (e.g. Heath 1983, Buckingham 1989) it does not offer a fully fledged coherent model of film language and is open to a considerable variety of interpretations, especially in what became known as 'Screen theory'. Heath (1983), for example, explores the idea of film language in relation to the unconscious, even considering its relationship to Vygotsky's theories of 'inner speech'. Film is operating not so much as a medium of communication here but as a model for the working of the psyche. Heath concludes by stressing the way that a 'film is always finished, enounced', and therefore this model of language emphasises the way the spectator is produced through the 'performance-enunciation' of cinematic language. The concept of language being employed here is therefore used to develop an intellectual model of the relationship between text, subject and institution. As an analysis of power and social relations, it allows for very little in the way of 'agency' and little in the way of learning or literacy. It clearly denies many of the dimensions of language study, language acquisition, sociolinguistics etc. that would logically attend the use of the metaphor if verbal language was the object of study. As Connell (1983) has argued this model of film language seems to deny any opportunity for pedagogic interventions. It does not even seem to impinge on the ideas of learning and development discussed so far.

Thus, Metz's arguments would go towards supporting a notion of film literacy in the broadest sense of literacy as an institutional practice, but it does not help us understand how we might read or write film. Indeed, although Metz claims that 'film is always understandable...as a language it is always grasped' he also maintains that 'the cinema is one way communication'. In fact, as I suggested above, it is the earlier practitioners, such as Pudovkin, who although operating with a more restricted notion of language, offer an idea of how one might learn to read *and write* film. Perhaps however, it might be reasonable to infer that these Soviet theorists' model of literacy might be rather 'skills based'. In particular the focus on montage, or even other notions of film editing, reduces film language to a matter of decoding syntax and image (word). It is precisely this narrow concept of language that contemporary theories of literacy seek to expand.

There have been a number of attempts to develop the analogy of film literacy from these models of film language, notably Cole and Keyssar (1985) and Buckingham (1993). Neither of these theories, however, explores the idea of *writing* film or television. I would also want to bear in mind Barton's (1994) parallel but related contention, that if the idea of literacy is broadened too much to become a general term for understanding, in the political interests of escaping from a restricted usage, then it loses its specific developmental focus in that the dimension of becoming (and especially *learning* to become) literate may be lost.

Cole and Keyssar's (1985) essay 'The concept of literacy in print and film' performs this broadening argument. Their premise is that 'reading is, of course, the fundamental form of literate competence' and that literacy is 'the ability to use graphic symbols to represent spoken language'. They then generalise about the nature of symbolic representation and apply these generalisations to film using a series of codes, concluding that:

film literacy is the ability to obtain meaning from the arrangements constituted by the film maker, in addition to meaning obtainable 'directly' from analgons³ (p. 61)

Although this sounds like the outline of a broad reaching theory, their conclusion is a good deal more tentative. Whilst there are absolute similarities in the way print and film can construct narrative they clearly 'represent different systems of literacy'. Thus:

because the social functions and training in print and film are distinct what we mean by literacy in each medium cannot be reduced to the psychological properties of each medium. (p.68/9)

Any general theory of mediated activity which is brought about by this kind of application of the metaphor of literacy thus runs the risk of losing its value by becoming too broad ranging. There seems to be no case for a form of universal cognitive underpinning.

On the other hand if such a claim might be argued to have been lost thorough such a re-focusing process, Buckingham (1993) demonstrates the value of persevering with the metaphor of literacy. His argument is that sustaining the metaphor of 'television literacy' powerfully impacts on conservative education systems by constantly questioning the idea that there might be a single fixed notion of literacy. Indeed there may be some evidence of the success of this strategy - albeit of a negative kind - in that pronouncements *against* other literacies can now be heard *in defence* in the printed word. Writing about 'television literacy' thus actively recuperates undervalued or seemingly transparent and naturalised competencies in the interest of the wider political argument.

What Buckingham set out to do was to define television literacy as a form of understanding about television *as a medium* which is socially produced through talk. Drawing on parallel work on print literacy (Heath 1983; Street 1984), Buckingham's approach is in contrast to the dominant

³ An 'analgon' is a term derived from Barthes (1977) essay 'The photographic message' It is an image that replicates experience in such a way that it is instantaneously recognised.

mode of academic studies in this field which define understanding about television in *psychological* terms. Rather than direct attention to 'lower order' or 'comprehension' skills, Buckingham's study analyses those 'higher order' competencies which might be presumed to constitute television literacy, for example, the understanding of genre, narrative and character. *Children Talking Television* demonstrates that the display and utilisation of such competencies is crucially dependent upon the social and discursive contexts in which they occur. I shall return below to this notion of a 'higher order' or 'cultural competence' as its place in Buckingham's theory of television literacy moves us beyond descriptions of televisual language to the social context of television's reception, and in this respect is similar to my attempt to describe media production as a form of literacy. Equally Buckingham's study moves beyond a mechanical, decontextualised notion of literacy acquisition to a view of literacy as a social practice, employing broadly ethnographic methods of research similar to those developed in this thesis.

As a final example of the application of literacy to the media but not in any way heir to the paradigms of film and film language, I want to explore a conceptualisation of computer literacy. I will be exploring media production on computers in Chapter Seven so we will return to some of these issues in greater detail. Lauterbach (1988) offers a coherent model of the topic. Like Barton above, he recognises that the term computer literacy can just mean 'getting used to computers', but it also implies the 'critical understanding of a technological, social and cultural phenomena.' To flesh out the rhetorical abstractions often concealed in the second kind of definition he maps out five attributes of the effects the 'new literacy' will have on what he calls 'classical literacy'. These 'five theses' are situated as evolutionary developments of traditional literacies, thus avoiding the either/or debate prevalent in some academic dispute relating to reading and writing.

First of all he describes the 'new devices' of computer literacy. Besides the obvious idea of word processing these might include touch screens, proof reading, layout, verbal, graphic and video display and voice processing. Secondly we have a new repertoire of symbols required to manage the computer environment. Both of these two thus enable 'new capabilities' when using computers including communication, memory, knowledge development, planning and problem solving. Finally we have an idea of new forms of social behaviour leading to new cultures. It is not so much that this model is startlingly original but that it represents a modest, almost conservative attempt to project the relationship traditional literacy might be said to have with the ways we think and order our worlds, onto a digital future. Methodologically this kind of projection proceeds from an understanding that literacy as a term attempts to describe a social dynamic rather than a fixed state of affairs.

There is thus a series of tensions implicit in uses of the literacy metaphor in relationship to the media. On the one hand, applying the idea of media literacy expands the notion of comprehension involved from decoding closed and finite meanings to a broad set of social knowledges and competencies. On the other hand, the metaphor runs into difficulty in 'translating' the role of language into the media production/reception situation. In particular the complex relationships between thought, talk and reading/writing seem to be qualitatively different in relation to media. Yet again, the fact that literacy has to be learned - if not always taught - has much to offer models of media use and understanding. And all of these questions need to be framed by a consideration of the discursive uses of the term within contemporary educational politics.

It is however, the precise impact that the idea of *writing* media might have on received models of media language and literacy which is the concern of this enquiry. To pursue this argument I will therefore examine theories of writing and writing instruction below. This will allow us to see

how such models might be conceptually applied to the process of making media as a form of expression or skills acquisition. However, I need also to investigate other notions of literacy, particularly those which explore different concepts of language and communication, rather than delimiting *writing* to models of communication and literacy derived exclusively from within the literary tradition.

Visual literacy

Perhaps one of the most commonly used alternatives to *media literacy* is the phrase *visual literacy*. Mainly used within the field of art education, but often found within earlier media education programmes, this concept remains one of the few ideas that systematically attempts to treat two of my concerns: the linguistic dimension of the media and a developmental approach to the acquisition of non-written literacies. The term is also used in reference to *writing* as well as *reading* (Raney 1997).

Within the field of art history it has been the historicist approaches of Panofsky (1991) and Gombrich (1960) which have most influenced discussions of visual literacy (Messaris 1994). These scholars particularly addressed the form and structure of Renaissance art. Put simply, they demonstrated that discrepancies between paintings' representation of the world and the world itself proved that the dominant mode of representation in Western art was founded upon a carefully constructed system of codes and conventions. Furthermore, to interpret these pictures viewers need to be informed as to the meanings attributed to the specific conventions, for example, the codes for perspective or framing: and therefore they needed to be *visually literate* to understand the pictures in the first place. In other words, the conventions of Western Art are arbitrary and culturally determined, as Saussure had argued in relation to language. These

conventions only make sense to people who can operate with the kind of knowledge learnt from Western culture.

Indeed the fact that conventions are culturally determined is the keystone for exponents of 'visual literacy'. This argument is ultimately derived from Saussurean linguistics, but most was systematically applied to visual images by Barthes (e.g. 1984). The argument is essentially that visual communication employs a series of codes, whose meaning is culturally determined, and pictorial representations communicate with us because we are literate in the use of those codes.

Although there is an element of *post hoc propter hoc* in these arguments, the implications for the study of film and photography are particularly important because of the traditional claims of both media to represent reality as though holding up 'a mirror to nature'. In terms of photography much work has gone into the study of the social use and purposes of the medium, particularly in relation to the construction of the family, but also into the ways that early photographs modelled their composition on portrait art (e.g. Sontag 1977; Kenyon 1992). Similarly in relation to film, it has been shown how the early film narratives of D.W. Griffith used inter-titles and transitions that readers of fiction (such as the work of Dickens) would have understood (Williams 1980). Equally conventions used in contemporary theatre, vaudeville and music hall were deployed by early cinematographers (Bordwell & Thompson 1993). The argument here is that it was the literate culture of the time that determined the forms and conventions of the new media and not any inherent properties of these 'mechanical' technologies.

However, it was the structuralism of Golay (1971) and Gauthier (1971) within film education which particularly influenced the BFI Education Department and gave rise to their seminal teaching packs, *Reading* and *Selling Pictures* (n.d.) in the late 1970's and early 1980's. These packs advocated a kind of visual literacy education, using the visual

tricks and illusions derived from work within perceptual psychology (underlying Gauthier's *Semiology of the Image*) to make strange and thus reveal the 'multi-layered significance' of images (Donald 1977). Students were invited to decode images by describing all the conventions, (lighting, angle, colour etc.) within them as well as acknowledging the influence of context. Particularly important was the concept of *anchorage*, determining how polysemic images could be fixed to one particular meaning through words or other contextualising devices.

It was argued, through teaching materials like these or the well known *Eyeopeners*, that students could be taught how to 'read' images (Bethell 1981). Students were required to follow a structured series of decoding exercises modelled on the work of Golay or Gauthier. However, all too frequently, this model of literacy echoed the closed model of comprehension contemporaneously being critiqued within the sister subject of English. There, Moy and Raleigh (1980-1) clearly showed that answering 'closed' questions about a decontextualised piece of writing only served to reward those students who had learnt how to play such arcane educational games: such activities could not be shown to advance understanding in any more general way. Despite the acceptance of this argument within progressive English it does not seem to have transferred to the study of images in either Art or Media Studies. Critical analysis of images here was presumed to act as a kind of 'media comprehension'. Indeed, work of this kind in media education is open to the same kinds of criticisms that might be made against traditional grammar teaching⁴.

However, this whole area of discussion has been most clearly sustained within critical art studies. Dondis's (1973) influential *Primer for Visual Literacy* draws on a linguistic model, and the phrase *visual literacy* is now enshrined in the current national curriculum (NCC 1995; see also Allen 1994; Andrews 1996).

⁴ However, recent debates within genre theory have reconsidered the role of explicit grammar teaching; see debates in Carter (1990) and Cope and Kalantzis (1993).

One of the strongest critiques of this model of visual literacy comes from Messaris (1994). His argument is that the concept of 'visual literacy' is substantially misleading. He characterises the concept as having a number of levels. At the bottom end is the assumption that visual literacy is a prerequisite for the comprehension of visual media. Secondly, it is argued that visual literacy itself has developmental implications and can lead to definite cognitive consequences: for example watching television is said to develop children's spatial awareness. Moving up the scale there is the idea that a visual education makes viewers more aware of manipulation, so that for example, watching television does not have cognitive effects (as in his second proposition) but would make children more aware of 'how meaning is created visually'. Finally he argues that an 'awareness of the ways in which visual media [can] give rise to meaning.. can provide a basis for informed aesthetic appreciation' (p.3).

Messaris' book absolutely rejects the first two of these propositions. Leaving aside the second, that visual literacy has general cognitive effects, which is not strictly pertinent to my study, his argument is that we do not need to *learn* how to read still and moving images. He thoroughly examines many of the codes and conventions associated with photography, looking at, for example, the use of angle of view from below or above to give the impression of power or weakness. Equally he explores the devices associated with the Hollywood cinema such as same place/same time transitions and other mechanisms of continuity editing. His conclusion is that 'the intelligibility of these conventions appears largely to be a matter of analogy to real-life perceptual cues' (p.20). In other words we do not need to be visually literate to read pictures, photographs or films because such media communicate naturally. One of the consequences of this view is that 'a new analytical 'language'(p.24) from a visually oriented educational system is not likely to be of much benefit to students because it replicates what they can understand in the first place.

Secondly Messaris implies that comprehending images is not likely to be culturally specific. This is more contentious. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, verbal language may be said to shape our cognitive or perceptual frameworks and therefore people from different cultures can quite literally be said to see the world in different ways (Whorf 1956). However, it is difficult to prove that different visual environments form our minds in the same way.

However much Messaris wants to reject the analogy between verbal language and the ways in which we make, read or see still or moving images, he is not arguing against the study of the visual. The concomitant half of his argument is that if we can move away from the idea of visual literacy then we can focus more clearly on the visual domain as a distinct field where meaning may be manipulated and aesthetic effects realised; that is, to concentrate on his third and fourth areas above. In that sense he advocates a form of visual education which focuses on the explicit understanding of conventions, because 'the ability to modify and extend' such conventions 'plays such a central role in [the] criteria of artistic evaluation' (p.181). He thus concludes by suggesting that there are three kinds of useful visual knowledge that one might want to build into the curriculum: knowledge of precedents, that is commonly used conventions, which 'can sharpen viewer's appreciation of skill and manipulative intent'; knowledge of socially important visual images, such as the photograph of children fleeing from napalm in Vietnam; and thirdly the use of visual material as documents of social history (Chapter Six).

Messaris' central argument is thus that the cultural transparency of much visual syntax thus makes the idea of visual literacy, in the sense of syntactic or structural competence, redundant. Nevertheless, on a political level I would want to argue that it is important never to let the idea of literacy congeal around written language but constantly to make it a term that stresses the active and continually changing nature of the process of

making social meaning. Indeed it was for this reason that Len Masterman (1980) coined the phrase 'teleliteracy' to validate media education in the early eighties. In this sense, then, Messaris does himself a disservice by disavowing the literacy metaphor. More than that, he runs the risk of reducing the study of the visual to a study of its aesthetic 'effects' if the actual meaning-making process within the visual domain is rendered unproblematic. A further criticism of his argument is that he appears to be concentrating on 'lower order' literacies, that is basic decoding. He does not address the more complex structures of genre, narrative (beyond sequencing events), representation or modality; all of which are central to the kinds of texts made and studied within media education at all levels (cf. Buckingham 1993). However, Messaris' approach does remain an important corrective to the emphasis on visual comprehension in early media education work in this field, like the BFI teaching packs or Bethell's (1981) work discussed above. Messaris might well help us understand the ways in which students might manipulate received conventions to achieve particular effects within their media productions. He does not, however, give us an approach which help us to understand how young people might use the visual as a medium of communication in contemporary culture.

Social semiotics

One such approach can be found in the work of social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988). In general terms social semiotics' concern is with:

social meanings constructed through the full range of semiotic forms
...in all kinds of human society and at all periods of human history
(Hodge and Kress 1988 p. 261)

Kress and van Leeuwen (1990) offer a complex and detailed study of the structure and forms of visual communication. Their book focuses on the

'grammar' of the visual; although the authors conceive of the visual, unlike Messaris, as an analogous language to written language, but, as an independent one:

Language and visual communication... both realise the same more fundamental and far reaching systems of meaning that constitute our culture. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1990 p.4).

Messaris's notion of an almost natural mode of perception for lower order seeing and understanding would thus be rejected by these authors who emphasise the determining influence of cultural systems. However, although their model of visual language acknowledges a problem identified by Barthes in any analysis of the visual, - that is, its potential indeterminacy of meaning - they do not accord the written any primacy in anchoring meaning. Indeed they stress a perceived absence in Barthes: that, 'the visual component of a text is an independently organised and structured message.'

The grammar described in this book is divided into three sections. First there is the *interpersonal*: the ways that the social participants, that is the viewer and an image are constructed in relation to another. Secondly there is the *ideational* content of images, how they can represent events in the world. Finally there are the *textual* elements of images, their representation of the structure of the world. This clearly situates meaning-making at a different level to Messaris. I will not summarise their complete taxonomy of images but, for example merely consider the analysis of images and social interaction. There the book details the difference between subjective and objective images: the horizontal or vertical angle of the viewer to the picture, suggesting involvement or power respectively; the effects of the size of frame and distance from the represented object; the ways that subjective images can be narrativised, or turned into stories; and questions about the modality of an image or the extent to which an image's representation of the world can be considered credible.

Kress and van Leeuwen's analysis of the various forms of social communication in images suggests how many kinds of communication actually take place through the relationship of the component parts of an image to the viewer. The concept of a visual grammar here is thus contingent on a broader theory of meaning, locating such meaning firmly within social interaction (Hodge & Kress 1988). Their emphasis is on meaning *as a relationship*, rather than a fixed property to be read off by the viewer, as in Messaris' more psychologically oriented account.

However, Messaris' work is helpful for the curriculum because it delimits the concept of visual literacy, restricting it to an understanding of manipulation and/or aesthetic intent. One of the prime values of an idea like literacy, as I have suggested above, is that it has to be learned (and frequently taught); and that it contains a notion of *developing* understanding. Barton's pluralist definition of literacy stresses terms like 'active' and 'confident' as opposed to 'can do, can't do' notions of learning. If visual literacy does not contain a notion of progression within it, so that schooling can make young people *more* active and confident in a domain of literacy, then the concept loses its educational potential. In this respect Kress and van Leeuwen are more cautious. They first of all suggest that their grammar is only 'a first step for teaching the practice of visual communication'. Their work offers a language to describe how we might read images but this is more on a meta-linguistic level: it is not the use we make of grammar when commonly talking about understanding written texts - except perhaps in the more formal activity of literary criticism. Their second suggestion is closer to Messaris. Children need to learn about the 'various genres and images of visual design' from the perspectives of social context; communicative purpose; medium used; and 'in choices from the 'visual grammar' available to them'. They suggest, therefore, that specific genres employ specific grammars; all of which have to be learnt.

Visual literacy clearly has a usefulness as a concept within media education; despite the obvious point, already indicated, that the media are not only visual. It is necessary to use the term both to stress the validity of forms of audio-visual communication, and to stress that such communication is carefully structured and organised. On the other hand it has not been proven how we might learn to *read* images or to *write* them, or even how we might learn to develop our competence in either practice. While it is clear that visual communication can be described in academic-grammatical terms, the validity of such a discourse remains open to question. Ultimately its usefulness may be primarily dependent on the contexts in which it can be deployed, such as its current position in the National Curriculum orders for Art (Raney 1997). At this stage, however, it should be clear that no simple model of language or literacy can be 'imported' into this discussion; although neither can the concepts be confidently excluded from it.

The process of writing

I want now to anchor this investigation in the specifics of writing because of the way such a perspective problematises many assumptions about media literacy - which as I have argued, has been traditionally conceptualised from the *reading* side of the coin. I want therefore to direct attention to a discussion of theories about the process of writing (to be differentiated from the *writing process* school of thought), and subsequently to discussion about teaching (and learning) writing. However, with the exception of suggestive asides, such as Thomas and Silk's remarks that 'researchers of children's emergent literacy should look at how children learn to draw' (quoted in Mathews 1993), there is virtually no literature on what I have termed *writing media*. I will therefore be offering a selective account of these

theories chiefly drawn from English studies, but explicitly inflected towards the focus of this enquiry. Before I do so, I should note Kress's (1997) study *Before Writing*, which explores how children move into print-literacy through a complex process. He shows young children experimenting with various kinds of representational activities including drawing, the use of colour and making models. He then offers a model of literacy which validates these activities as part of the strategies children use to become fully literate in a complex, highly communicational society such as our own. His study is highly suggestive for my own project but it is directed towards print-literacy, despite its inclusive attitude towards the 'multi-modal' nature of sign-making.

As Harris (1986) has indicated, thinking about writing has undergone an important shift of emphasis on three counts. First there is the increased understanding about the differences between speech and writing; secondly there has been a change of emphasis as to the 'nature and internal organisation of written text'; and thirdly, a different model of the process of writing itself is now more generally accepted. It is of course difficult to separate out accounts of the process of writing from theories of writing instruction because it is frequently only within the literature of the latter that any theorisation of writing takes place at all. Indeed this last point is rendered more problematic by the fact that discussion of writing can also take place on what at first glance seems fundamentally opposed levels. Thus, on the one hand, the last decade has seen an upsurge of interest in the work of Bakhtin and post-structuralist accounts of the *writerly* text; whilst on the other, we have attention to the micro-processes of handwriting formation and orthographic conventions. Both perspectives offer important insights into the nature of writing; yet traditionally such studies take place in different academic realms.

One of the benchmark studies in any account of the writing process is the substantial Schools Council project, entitled *The Development of Writing*

Abilities (11-18) co-authored by Britton *et al* (1975). This project not only collected a substantial amount of data in the form of young people's writing, but attempted to synthesise an important body of theory in order to derive a working model of the writing process. The study posited a 'multidimensional model' of the nature of writing, broadly reducing it to three stages: conception, incubation and production. This analysis of the protracted and complex nature of the writing process is important: it certainly re-configured writing as a complicated and multi-faceted activity as opposed to a single act of composition at the moment of textual production. The authors then went on to outline two fundamental axes to their model: a sense of *audience* and the *functions* of the piece of writing being undertaken. Both of these axes were further subdivided. There were thus several levels of audience ranging from the self, through different teacher roles to an unknown wider audience. Equally within the broad notion of there being three categories of writing (transactional, expressive and poetic) there were a significant number of further subdivisions. Thus, for example, within the transactional category there were two threads - informative and conative - and these were then further broken down. The final element of this model was the distinction between a participant and spectator role available to the writer. The authors hypothesised that these positions were spread along a continuum in parallel to the categories of writing undertaken. Thus the writer was more inclined to adopt a spectator role when writing poetic texts and move to a participant position when working in a transactional mode. (For a strong critique of this argument see Moss (1989) especially Chapter Two.)

Britton *et al's* study then proceeded to map its data onto this model, quantifying the amount of writing addressed to different audiences and/or undertaken within certain categories. The conclusions of this study were, of necessity, varied. One of its central tenets was to reinforce a Vygotskian concept of learning; thus maintaining that the process of writing in and of

itself, offered ways of structuring, systematising and reflecting upon the world. However, perhaps its main impact was to force teachers to re-evaluate the *simulated* nature of many writing situations. The study clearly found that most writing was of the transactional variety and, slightly more negatively, that most of it was undertaken for teachers in their audience role as examiners. The study strongly suggested that if students were to undertake different kinds of writing for different audiences this might improve the quality of their work.

There are several implications from their overall findings that I wish to take forward in my account. First, there is the way in which the nature of school writing, in that it is produced within the artificial constraints of the school curriculum, over-determines the kind of writing produced. Secondly, there is the emphasis on the writer's sense of audience being the single most influential factor in determining that writer's fluency. This sense of audience was contrasted with the immediacy of communication within oral contexts:

The writer does not, like the speaker, have the context of situations displayed before him, but *must represent to himself* [sic] a context of a situation, and this includes the reader. (Britton *et al* 1975 pp. 61 original emphasis).

I will return to the *dialogic* implications of this argument later.

The main pedagogic implication from this study was an attention to the complex and *recursive* process of writing: the ways in which the act of writing involve a continual sense of returning to, and reflecting upon, one's work - particularly how writers conceptualise hypothetical (and actual) readers. The threefold nature of the writing model, the emphasis on reflection and reading and re-reading one's writing, had an enormous impact on the ways in which English teachers considered writing as a *process* rather than a single activity. Again, I will return later to this notion that writing is not only an extended activity, but one which is profoundly

social, in that it involves teachers and learners discussing, interacting and formulating ideas. As a pedagogy the work is perhaps best known through its promulgation in the United States by Donald Graves (1983), whose own study institutionalised what became known as the 'process writing' or 'conference-drafting' model of writing. This, as is clear in both phrases, also focused work in the classroom on writing as an extended and collaborative process.

Both Graves and Britton *et al* turned teacher attention away from questions of surface accuracy (spelling conventions, capitalisation etc.) - though not to the extent their critics have claimed - and focused instead on the *content* and *communicative purpose* of writing⁵. It also encouraged a culture of teaching which paid more attention to reading students' work *for itself* rather than simply marking its surface accuracy, and as we will see later, this is part of the larger attention to young people's culture which underlies my study (for a discussion of this 'turn' in English see Burgess 1993). This divergence between content and surface accuracy stems from the influence of the psycholinguistic school of reading (see Smith 1982). This offered a model of mind and language which stressed the active power of the human mind to hypothesise and guess the meaning within chunks of text. It again throws the emphasis *beyond* the surface of the writing towards the social *contract* (to use Smith's term) between reader and writer. Writing thus becomes as much a matter of conceptualising readers' expectations as anything else; though to suggest that any of the theorists mentioned so far do not encourage attention to the surface appearance of writing skills is an unfair rendition of their work. Again then, we can observe a loosening of the chains between meaning and linguistic appearance which allows potential re-conceptualisation of literacies. Attention is directed to the multiple modes of communication and cultural

⁵ From this perspective the contemporaneous study by Lorac and Weiss (1981) discussed in Chapter One can be seen as an application of this shift in attitudes towards writing or media production by young people in general.

production. It is not restricted to the mechanics and processes of particular symbol systems.

Nevertheless, the influence of what became known as the 'genre' school of writing has re-emphasised the elements of linguistic form and structure. It has made a strong case that meaning is embedded within these specific forms and cannot be unshackled to the extent that Graves, particularly, suggests. A number of studies (e.g. Gilbert 1989, Moss 1989 and Cope and Kalantzis 1993) have mounted polemical attacks against Graves's emphasis on expressive writing (in ways that parallel deconstructionist critiques of progressivism described in the previous chapter). Gilbert, for example, draws on post-structuralist critiques (in Foucault and Barthes) to question essentialist and individualist notions of creativity. She argues that Graves's model of young writers as *authors* fundamentally misconstrues the power relations between teacher and taught. Both she and Moss also question the nature of *voice* (an ironic metaphor, in view of writing's fraught relationship with speech, as we shall see below) and try to relocate the writing process far more within the mainstream production of generic texts.

Genre and orality

Genre theory, which fundamentally derives from the renewed attention to the structure and organisation of texts and their social functions offers a renewed linguistic perspective on the writing process. It also picks up one of the threads identified above, namely the differences between speech and writing.

Kress (1994) provides one of the most comprehensive studies from within this tradition. He argues that writing theory originated from an 'upside down' point of view, maintaining that it is primarily through

reading theory that the writing process has been defined. This is an argument I have already touched on, when describing how psycholinguistic reading theory became incorporated in the *process writing* school. Thus, writing is reduced either to the study of intentions and effects, or 'translating speech into writing' (for a discussion of these perspectives on reading see Harrison and Coles 1992). This argument clearly runs parallel to the discussion in the first part of this chapter and the last, which argued that media education, and notions of media literacy, have been skewed towards the *reading* domain in what amounts to a paradigmatic formation of the subject.

There is of course, a complex interaction between reading and writing on a number of levels to which we shall return in the following chapters when we look at work produced by students. In the context of this discussion it is unclear which might come first - reading or writing - and whether this is important to the ways each or both process might develop. Secondly, it is of course a crucial difference that more people are readers (in varying degrees) than writers: it is the former competence which is most frequently used at home for leisure or at work. Nevertheless, the distinctiveness of writing can best be seen in opposition to speech. Ong's (1982) study of the historical origins of writing shows that writing performed a specific social function by recording oral communication. In doing so, as Ong puts it, 'writing restructures consciousness'. Although he does not reference the pedagogic theories of Vygotsky here, there is clearly common ground between the idea discussed above in Britton *et al* that the process of writing organises thought and the position adopted by Ong. He then proceeds to describe the various kinds of scripts, (e.g. ideograms) that developed across the world and the differing ways that they represent the speech as does our alphabet. Quite how this might be translated into a notion of a 'media script' is unclear and profoundly problematic - partly because, as discussed above, there is no single unitary media language. It is

also a difficult analogy to sustain because there is no equivalent activity or social process to speech in respect of 'media writing'. However Ong does make the case that orality possesses its own discrete forms of textuality and argues that these are structurally and ideologically different from the textual forms of writing, which developed later *and alongside* these earlier forms. It is the rejection of a teleological history which is important for our argument, because it implies that different communication forms can, and indeed need to, co-exist - as opposed to the determinism of some scholars who have argued that later forms *replace* the earlier ones.

At the same time Ong makes the observation that many of today's mass media forms create what he suggestively calls, 'secondary orality', an argument taken up by many media scholars (e.g. Ang 1985; Fiske 1989), but he does not discuss what might constitute 'secondary literacies', or other forms of writing. There are further parallels here between the populist politics of some media scholars, who maintain that *reading* forms of popular culture in and of itself acts as a form of political resistance (see the discussions in Seiter *et al* 1989) and Kress's observations about the politics of *reading* theory. The connection is the desire to validate the power of the reader/consumer across these domains over the power of the text.

However the fundamental problem in extending the analogy between the mass media and modern forms of orality is that, although it is easy to imagine communities of readers in this new oral culture (and that is how Fiske and others describe the audience here), being a listener/viewer is not the same as being a speaker (for a critique of Fiske's position see Murdock 1989). Modern forms of mass media, such as television, may contribute towards an oral culture but not everyone can take part (as producers) in the way we all can participate in an oral culture (as speakers). Another more relevant contemporary parallel might be the Internet. Again this might contribute towards a culture of gossip (cf. Fiske *ibid.*; Jones 1995); but here, of course, you have to be able to *write*, or at least enter signs at a computer

keyboard, in order to access the Web. In other words, although a concept of 'secondary orality' is attractive in relationship to media, it still raises very basic problems as to what might function as *speech*. And by definition, if that comparison poses problems, then it is even more difficult to know how such a parallel could be extended further.

Kress, however, pursues a comparison between the textual forms of writing and those of speech in his study of children learning to write. He maintains that:

speech and writing [are] two models of language with distinctive grammatical and textual elements. Consequently learning to write has some of the features of learning to write a second language (Kress 1994 p. 8)

This makes an interesting contrast with Ong's observations about primary and secondary oralities and also raises questions about the order in which one learns to operate in different languages (as Ong's work also does: see above). Indeed notions of second language learning are immensely suggestive for media education: the idea of making media as a form of bilingual or second language work is an idea we will pursue. Mayor's (1994) related description of *interlanguage*, that is the 'interference' from first to second language forms is a concept we will return to, as is the implication of *biliteracies* in her study.

However, let us return to the linguistic model employed by Kress first. He identifies a number of differences between spoken and written language and shows how young writers learn to control these features. These start from the microscopic structures of writing, namely the unit of sense and the sentence. However, at the other end of the scale are the macro-features of the text under construction, its generic form and narrative shape which is where much discussion around the languages of media production take place. Genre, form and convention are common terms in such a discussion. What constitutes the sentence or the conjoiners

of causality, are, by contrast, barely comprehensible concepts in this context - although it should be noted that 'textbooks' on camera angles and lighting may be examples of micro-features.

Kress compares and contrasts linguistic features at both ends of this scale with forms of children's speech, concluding:

the child must learn the syntax of written language, the textual structure of writing, the conventional forms - the genres - of writing, and with these the new cognitive ways of organising the world...

Learning to write involves the learning of new forms of syntactic and textual structure, new genres, new ways of relating to unknown addressees. (Kress 1994 p. 62)

The idea that there are cognitive 'benefits' to becoming a fluent writer (an idea shared with Ong, and key to Street's notion of 'autonomous' literacy) derives from the rationalistic assumptions in the work of Vygotsky (see also the parallel with Messaris' second proposition of visual literacy, above). The model of *thinking* operating here maintains that language is the predominant way of organising and developing cognition. This perspective has become a kind of orthodoxy in the field and is scarcely challenged. Indeed the study by Scardamalia and Bereiter (1985), which questions the exact ways in which writing may or may not enhance thought, is a rare investigation of this belief. That study concluded that writing did not, in and of itself, develop thinking, but suggested that cognitive development was dependent on the writer and the pedagogic situation in which the writing took place.

The heart of Kress's argument is that writers need to learn the linguistic forms of different social genres - a position central to the genre school of writing (see Cope and Kalantzis 1993). On one level this is no more than a development of Britton *et al*'s attention to the different functions of writing. That study identified a need to teach students to operate across the full range of writing categories. Ultimately genre theory extends Britton's

notion of a writing process as a dialogue, to a fully fledged model of 'social production'. The elements in Kress's interpretation of this model consist of five elements and worth while quoting at length.

There is, first, the question of difference: what is the motivation of this text? Second, a text is always produced on a specific occasion of social interaction, and the characteristic factors of that occasion of interaction give a particular form of the text: this is what I refer to as genre. Third, there is the question of how the issues talked or written about are organised linguistically [] This is what I refer to as a discourse. Fourth, which of the deep cultural modes of textual organisation are present or dominant [] and lastly, what does the material aspect of the text reveal about the social characteristics of production of the text? (Kress 1993 p. 229).

However, despite points of continuity with writing theory developing from Britton *et al's* study, genre theory (encompassing as it does a spectrum of opinion) has engendered debate on a number of levels, particularly around pedagogy (see Barrs 1994). Genre theorists' reaction against progressivism, exemplified in critiques of Graves' attention to the expressive, has led to a neo-conservative form of traditional pedagogy. Children, it is argued, should be explicitly taught the formal features of different language genres - 'Genres are learnt by some form of copying' (Cope and Kalantzis 1994 p. 67). Barrs's critique of this model, that it too ends up alienating young people from school, in the same way as Cope and Kalantzis argue progressivism did, has a resonance for the kind of media work I shall explore in this thesis. And of course, this same argument directly mirrors our discussion in the previous chapter about the ways in which young people should be taught the grammar of film.

However, genre theory clearly allows us to extrapolate theories of making meaning into communication forms other than print. Kress states this explicitly when he asks three questions:

..what does each writer have available to her or him as the set of literacy resources, as her or his available means of representation?
Second: how does each writer use the resources to make new signs?
And third: what changes happen to the particular forms as a result of being made a part of a new sign? (Kress 1993 p. 205)

This is not to say that Kress wishes to expand the concept of literacy beyond the verbal medium. On the contrary he rejects such a position unequivocally (p. 209) concluding:

..literacy is that mode of representation in which the semiotic medium of language - the meaning system of language - is given material expression by means of the graphic form of letters. The interrelation between the meaning system and its form of expression is a dynamic one. (p. 212).

However, by demarcating the role of verbal/print language Kress then opens up the ground for other forms of semiosis, arguing that 'all texts are multi-modal [] they are messages constructed out of a number of modes of representation' (p. 213). He thus ends up with a model of 'textual structuring' which allows for other kinds of texts than written ones and which builds on the model of Britton *et al* (1975) in terms of its complexity.

Literary theory

We will return to the usefulness of aspects of this model below, but there is one further and very broad area of discussion about writing which we have not yet touched upon and which informs Kress's notion of the social process of writing: namely literary theory. In particular, the work of Bakhtin and aspects of theoretical correspondence with the work of Vygotsky are important here. Of course whereas all the work discussed above - that is the work drawn from education and language study - takes *writing* to mean all

writing produced by young people at all stages, in literary studies the notion of writing tends to stand for the work of canonical authors.

Despite this reservation, much of the work I have discussed does in fact draw on similar ideas in the work of Soviet theorists of the twenties and thirties. In particular, arguments about the differences between speech and writing derive from a core set of ideas. Vygotsky's differentiation between speech and writing (1962 p. 98) clearly underpins much writing theory, and certainly supports the theoretical foundations of Kress's model outlined above. When Kress describes writing as a 'weave' of these five factors, he is echoing Vygotsky's 'deliberate structuring of the web of meaning' (1962 p. 100). However, Vygotsky also develops a notion of inner speech - which is central to his developmental model of consciousness and intelligence and which he argues *follows* oral speech - but is the exact opposite of written speech in syntactical and grammatical terms. Emerson (1986), has shown how Vygotsky's notion of inner speech and Bakhtin's concept of language both set out to:

resolve the unsatisfactory stalemate between individualistic subjectivism and abstract objectivism.... [through] a dynamic synthesis focusing on the concrete speech act. (Emerson 1986 p. 27/8).

Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin provide a *social* explanation for individual consciousness as a 'socio-ideological' fact through a discussion of how words and language structure thought. In so doing, both theorists crossed one of the central divides in Western philosophical thought: the divide between self and society. From this perspective, Bakhtin's discussion of writing offered an account of literature that, in principle, did not reify the individualistic powers of the great writer but located the language of writing firmly within a materialist analysis of social forces.

By shifting the emphasis away from individual expressiveness towards the generic, Bakhtin also offers some general theses on the nature of writing. These have been described in terms of a series of binary

oppositions in the structuralist tradition - e.g. monologic/dialogic; carnival/canonical etc. (Lodge 1990). It is certainly true that Bakhtin used a historicist poetics, excavating the growth of literary forms, in order to move between these oppositions. Most notably, of course, he used the development of the novel to explain the essentially *dialogic* nature of writing - that is, the ways in which all utterances are shaped and simultaneously shape response, even within inner speech (see Morris 1994). This emphasis on interaction and continual dialogue leads to a critique of writing as an inherently unstable process, in contradiction to the logocentric tradition in European culture in which writing fixes and stabilises meaning (see Derrida 1977). Bakhtin thus advocated the notion of *heteroglossia*, or incorporating 'another's speech in another's language....a type of double voiced discourse' (1981 p. 324).

This notion is generalised further to explain the form of certain kinds of writing; 'a typical double-accented, double styled *hybrid construction*' (1981 p. 304). This he explains as:

an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two 'languages' (1981 p. 304).

I shall return to this notion of hybridity and the mixture of genres and languages throughout my analysis of students' media productions in Chapters Four to Seven. However, in the context of my discussion here it is important to note the difference between this position and the more functionalist model of writing categories in the work of Britton and Graves - although such differences may well be attributable to Bakhtin's concern with 'literature'. Secondly, it is important to note that the impact of this concept of hybridity has been widespread. It has been used to describe forms of cultural production well beyond the literary form of the novel - for example, in Paul Gilroy's (1987) characterisation of the 'syncretic culture' in

contemporary Black Britain. There are obvious connections between this notion of writing and the concept of *intertextuality*. Although this latter concept is mainly derived from reception and reader-response theory (see Holub 1984), it is implied in Bakhtin's formulation of mixed genres operating self-consciously for writer and reader alike (for a discussion of the centrality of intertextuality to postmodern writing, see Collins 1989).

Finally in this section, I want to return to the central concern of this thesis, namely how one might derive an expanded notion of writing from the work of these theorists. Vygotsky argues that being able to write entails an ability to operate self-consciously within the symbolic system of language:

In learning to write, the child must disengage himself from the sensory aspect of speech and replace words by images of words. Speech that is merely imagined and that requires symbolisation of the sound image in written signs (i.e. a second degree of symbolisation) naturally must be much harder than oral speech (1962 p. 98-9).

This is not however, an argument for other kinds of symbolic activity. There is a strict chain of cognition between inner speech, oral speech and written speech, all of which operate within the medium of language. On this account he does not even imply, nor is his work suggestive of, any attempt to break out of a delimited concept of literacy. It is not so much that I want to recuperate Vygotsky in a strategic reading of his work; but more that, since most of the models of writing I have been looking at derive in some way or another from the Vygotskian paradigm, the absence here of any turn to a more general semiotic theory does raise serious questions about my project. As we shall see, Kress's notion that to an extent writing is like using a second language, as well as his more generalised semiotic model of language may offer me a way out of this impasse. On the other hand, as I have already implied in the first part of this chapter, such an impasse may not be that important, in that it is not so much the actual models of reading

and writing that define the value of the notion of literacy, so much as political and social uses of the term.

Nevertheless, Bakhtin does offer a more inclusive notion of communication. He argues that the hybrid construction of the novel ultimately results in not just a 'system of languages', but 'a system of *images* of languages'. Language possesses the ability to:

represent another language while still retaining the capacity to sound simultaneously both outside and within it, to talk about it and at the same time to talk in and with it... (1981 p. 358)

What this rather complicated and slightly convoluted argument maintains is that writing always operates at what Vygotsky called the level of 'conscious work'. Because it is constantly representing itself in the process of representing other representations of the world, it continually draws attention to the mechanisms by which it produces meaning. This position thus seeks to imbue writing with a very postmodern sense of reflexivity. There is an inbuilt tendency to self-awareness that borders on the parodic, as if all writing reveals its process of making meaning as it is read. One significant inference here is pedagogic: the argument is for engaging in an explicit level of meta-linguistic discussion and debate. As I have argued, this inference is also at the heart of the genre theorists' position. However, as I will also show in the following chapters, media production fundamentally and *necessarily* operates on this level of secondary symbolisation: it inevitably involves incorporating 'images of languages' into the forms of writing that young people develop; and the process of hybridisation - which is almost unavoidable - encourages the use of appropriate and differing language systems simultaneously.

From writing to cultural production

So far this discussion has explored theories of writing from what might be termed a 'bottom-up' perspective. That is to say, the argument has explored how *writing* might function as a metaphor for the mechanics and processes of media production. In this section I want to take a 'top-down' perspective and explore some of the theoretical arguments that might be used to describe the products of young people's media culture as written artefacts. Like many kinds of literacy studies, theories of youth culture have explored the 'writings' of those cultures, almost as it were from the reader's point of view. They have argued that forms of cultural production by young people, from music to fashion, act like *texts*; and as texts they may be seen as forms of writing.

Perhaps the most well known example of this approach is to be found in Dick Hebdige's (1979) analysis of Punk. Essentially Hebdige argued that many aspects of Punk - the music, the argot, the uses of the body and dress - are all coherent and interconnected forms of semiotic creativity which may be *read* as forms of political and cultural expression. Thus, he used the concept of *bricolage* to describe how punk dress (its bin liners, lavatory chains and safety pins etc.) was constructed to create a statement that could be read by those with knowledge of the relevant sign system. The concept of *bricolage* derives first of all from the work of Levi-Strauss and secondly from the field of *avant garde* art. It invokes two perspectives: a view of Punk as a form of popular culture (reflecting its practitioners' roots in art school situationism: see also Savage 1994) and an expanded notion of semiosis derived from post Saussurean structuralism. This latter tradition explores kinds of signification other than print-writing within the sign systems of any given culture and opens the door to consider non-written forms of cultural production as kinds of *writing* (see Clarke 1975).

The use of this concept explicitly raises a problem central to work in this tradition: who has the appropriate knowledge to make readings in this way? On what levels are the writers of popular culture (in this case Punks), literate in the way that 'readers' (in this case academics) are? In other words what methodological rationale is needed to make *ideological* readings of popular culture?

Despite this obvious and unresolved dilemma, Hebdige's work, itself located within the convergence of traditions that revolved around the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the seventies and eighties (Hall 1992), has proved enormously influential in defining a model for the interpretation of young people's culture as forms of inscription or writing. This model was developed further by a move in Cultural Studies away from concentrating exclusively on *texts* to an emphasis on how popular culture is integrated into the lived experience of young people. McRobbie's (1991) work exemplifies this shift. Whereas her earlier analysis of texts, like the teen magazine *Jackie*, had explored ways in which young people might be manipulated by these texts, her later work looked at the multifaceted nature of girls' lives incorporating a range of cultural activities. Underlying this shift was a changing use of the paradigm of ideology. Drawing on Abercrombie *et al's* (1980) critique of what they called 'the dominant ideology thesis', Cultural Studies began to move away from a simple notion of texts being the bearers or channels of ideology - and its concomitant position that young people are the dopes of popular culture - towards a more complex analysis of the role of social power within the symbolic materials of culture and its role in peoples' lives.

Indeed a good deal of work in Cultural Studies during the last decade has focused on the appropriation and negotiation of forms of popular culture from this perspective. Thus, Fiske's (1989) study of Madonna wannabee's or McRobbie's (1991) study of teenyboppers are emblematic of an approach which explores how the manipulation of signs by the young consumer *re-*

writes or re-inscribes a different level of meaning from that which was intended by the producers of those signs. To this end, forms of popular culture have been analysed with a view to developing an understanding of how power functions within contemporary society. Popular culture, it has been argued, represents an arena where the traditionally oppressed may resist the ideologies of the powerful (de Certeau 1984). Thus, to return to Hebdige, the semiotic appeal of Punk was for the alienated underclass who were seen to use the signs and symbols of this language as a means of political expression. Similarly (although from different angles) McRobbie and Fiske use the analysis of popular culture as an opportunity to explore the ways by which girls 'gender themselves', and to show how girls' subversion of patriarchal capitalism may be undertaken through these modes of appropriation and resistance.

These critiques explicitly challenge the sexist bias of previous work on youth culture, e.g. studies of mods and skinheads (see Hall and Jefferson 1976). Similarly pulling away from the norm was the work of Paul Gilroy (1987) which drew on earlier work around ethnicity and identity to formulate a notion of *syncretic cultures*. Gilroy's work paid particular attention to the ways in which the forms of Black, and White British and Black British culture continually drew upon each other and mutated. Thus his work focused on aspects of Black popular culture which were developing hybrid forms. These were addressed to 'new' audiences who brought this understanding of contemporary cultural developments with them. According to Gilroy, the comedian Lenny Henry, or the music of *Soul II Soul* were instances of this hybrid culture, and as such, undermined fundamentalist or essentialist beliefs in racial identity (Gilroy 1993).

Underlying this kind of work around class, race and gender lie two central hypotheses about culture. First, there is the argument that culture operates both *as* and *in* a linguistic domain - a view which, as Hall (1989;1992) makes clear, derives from theoretical work within the post-

Saussurean tradition of structuralist semiotics. From this perspective it shares considerable common ground with work described in the preceding section; especially that which works against the logocentrism of Western culture. Secondly there is the argument that culture in some way 'carries' ideological meanings and that these meanings can be expressed, negotiated and restated by work in the same linguistic axis. There were various theoretical attempts to formulate these insights, most notably Hall's essay (1980) 'Encoding/decoding' and the subsequent work of David Morley, especially in his (1980) study of the *Nationwide* audience (see also Morley 1992).

Yet again, these approaches within the burgeoning discipline of Cultural Studies were primarily exploring the metaphor of language and expression from the reading side of the coin. The forms of cultural literacy operating in these models of youth culture were primarily *reading* competencies - although none of the literature I have mentioned so far even expresses it in these terms. Indeed, as I have already implied, the attention in these studies was to levels of immanent meaning rather than to the process of its construction; and in this respect, young people's *re-readings* of forms of culture are given prominence (see Harris 1992).

In fact very little work within this tradition explores the *making* of popular culture products. The notable exception to this is the later work of Paul Willis (1990). Willis' earlier work, *Learning to Labour* (1977) primarily offered a reading of 'lads' *behaviour* as part of a cultural studies analysis of the processes of social reproduction - showing how working class lads 'en-culturate' themselves for working class jobs thus resisting the bourgeois aspirations of the Educational system. Willis interpreted the lads' use of the body (especially through fighting) and language as expressive of both personal and broader social- ideological positions. This approach utilised the semiotic/linguistic dimension underpinning the work of the Birmingham Centre.

However this attention to the expressive cultures of youth led to Willis's research in the 1980's which examined more organised forms of cultural expression. His starting point was that the Arts, conventionally defined, actually worked to *exclude* youth cultures. He argued that forms of popular culture offered young people more genuine and authentic means of aesthetic expression than the forms and institutions of High Art - which are supposed, certainly within the school curriculum, to fulfil that function.

In 1990 this research led to the publication of two reports, *Moving Culture* and *Common Culture*. These set out to describe and theorise forms of 'creative work' by young people. In addition to describing young people's appropriation of media culture through consumption, Willis also gives examples of how media technologies are used to create forms of popular culture. The most visible of these is, of course, playing music, and there have been more detailed subsequent studies in this field (e.g. Fornas *et al* 1995 and see below). However Willis also notes other forms of creative activity, ranging from video and photography to making fanzines or designing and working in the fashion world (see also McRobbie 1989).

Willis's (1990) developed the concept of 'symbolic creativity' to explain the meaning and significance of cultural production. He argued that young people's consumption *and* production of mass culture offered a variety of ways to 'develop and affirm our active senses of our own vital capacities':

Symbolic creativity is more fully the practice, the making.... This is the production of *new* (however small the shift) meanings intrinsically attached to feelings, to excitement and psychic movement. (Willis 1990 p.11)

There is an obvious connection with the traditions of Romantic creativity here, although Willis is very much concerned to develop a democratising perspective. In essence, however, both titles, *Moving* and *Common Culture*, offer puns expressing a central thesis: that we need to pay attention to an inclusive definition of culture rather than conceive of it in formal terms

associated with High Art (as of course Raymond Williams and others had argued: see Hall 1992). In other words Willis offered an implicit critique of schooled culture in favour of re-asserting the expressive value of common culture.

This work has two important implications for my study. First, Willis attempted to show the ways in which the consumption and production of popular media was perhaps the most important means of expression available to the young. The case studies (Chapters Four to Seven) draw substantially on this approach. Secondly, Willis implicitly draws on a theory of learning in his descriptions of the creative work by young people - although I shall argue that his failure to make such theories explicit makes his project vulnerable to criticism.

One important difference between my analysis of media production by young people and that of Willis is that he does not explore *how* young people might learn to work within these various media forms. His work is set within the informal youth sector whereas my work is set in schools: yet learning and teaching take place in both sites. Indeed this argument is highlighted in my discussion of Dewdney and Lister (1988) in the previous chapter. Richards (1992) criticises the rhetoric of empowerment surrounding Willis's work, arguing that Willis invests young people's cultures with an aura of romance . Rather than standing back and admiring cultural production as a romanticised form of political resistance, Richards suggests that such an approach ignores crucial relations of power existing between the researcher and the researched, and between teachers and students:

To attempt to 'enfranchise' students without radically redefining how varieties of non-school knowledge and experience might be valued may do no more than secure existing advantage (Richards 1992:85).

Despite the fact that Willis's argument itself is directed towards overturning the power relations between forms of High and Popular

Culture, Richards suggests that in seeking to validate young people's cultural production, Willis himself falls into the same trap of reifying an essentialist aesthetic experience.

Furthermore, Willis's more aggregated notion of creativity has been accused of over-simplification in that it effectively equates the domains of production and consumption. Purchasing and listening to a certain kind of music, for example, being part of that style or sub-culture blurs with the making, manufacturing and marketing of the culture. Buckingham (1993b) argues that this is symptomatic of a general trend in Cultural Studies, particularly the approach developed by John Fiske (1989). Buckingham (1993b) accuses Willis of a kind of 'cultural optimism' (p.206) suggesting that in blurring the difference between consumption and media production as well as between all the different kinds of cultural activities described in *Common Culture*, Willis's 'generalised enthusiasm for young peoples 'vitality', imagination' and 'discrimination' and his claims for political significance, carry a distinct air of wishful thinking' (1993b:205). Like Richards, Buckingham argues that this tradition within academic Cultural Studies, mistakes the aura of political empowerment surrounding forms of cultural activity for *evidence* of real political resistance. Harris (1992) is particularly severe on the work of the Birmingham Centre for precisely this reason: he argues that the reading of cultural activity as political action pays insufficient attention to the material complexities of people's lives and that we should not endow cultural production with excessive political significance.

It is for this reason that I am more concerned to disentangle precisely how young people might *learn* to operate as *media producers* within the specific context I observed. However, I share Willis's notion that despite being positioned unequally in relation to multinational media producers, young people can and do *make media* for an audience of their peers. In Willis' study the peer audience is often located in the immediate

community. My study is set within the institutional context of the school; an arena of potential cultural activity often ignored by Cultural Studies. Nevertheless these criticisms of Willis's project are important because they help establish clear limits to the claims made for young people's cultural production. The critiques suggest a need to be cautious when *reading* young people's cultural activities and also when using research in support of broader political arguments.

The idea that many young people might be media producers informally, that is at home or through unstructured peer networks, has also been argued by Nava (1992) and Kenyon (1992). Perhaps the most visible form of young peoples' informal production has, however, been in the field of music (see Jones 1988 and Durant 1990). Durant (1990) is one of the few writers in this tradition to describe how young people might learn both the skills and the languages that are required for Willis's cultural democracy. In a provocative attempt to re-conceptualise 'musical literacy' he examines the influence of technological developments in music making. He argues that the digitalisation of sound and the computerisation of composition methods means that 'reading' music is no longer a matter of interpreting musical scores, but is now crucially dependent upon knowledge of software programmes. Equally, the nature of 'writing' music is shifting away from the specialised knowledge of traditional musical notation, and towards 'sampling' or creative production. In this context, even 'listening' to music takes on a different meaning from traditional concepts of musical literacy.

However, although this account implies that the linguistic dimension is part of a notion of media literacy, Durant does not describe in any more detail how groups or individuals might *acquire* such knowledge. In many ways like Willis, he avoids this question. Broadly speaking, these accounts of media production do not focus either on linguistic acquisition or aesthetic experience, but on more general *cultural competencies*. This may be a significant theoretical development in the way in which we might wish to

re-conceptualise contemporary literacies. On the one hand it implies a shift from a restricted model of language conceived in terms of disembodied 'skills' to the more inclusive notion of social semiotics (see above). It attempts to relocate the concept of culture, not in a closed model of structured communication but in an open-ended *social process*. The idea of cultural competence may thus offer a way of synthesising the tensions between the linguistic and the aesthetic in a way that does justice to the complex interplay of knowledge, understanding, social relations and skills that can go into forms of cultural production.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the phrase 'cultural competence' merely disguises the difficulty of reconciling these kinds of tensions. The term does embody a social dimension (in its use of 'culture'), but in keeping with my earlier discussion of assessment (Chapter One), it is not always clear what might be the difference between a 'competence' and a 'skill'. There may be a discursive value for Willis, amongst others, in using a 'new' term, which carries fewer connotations of cultural value, but it does not necessarily offer insight into the processes of making and understanding meaning. I have suggested that Willis has been accused of blurring important boundaries between consumption and production and it may well be that an inclusive phrase like 'cultural competence' accentuates this lack of clarity in his analysis. On the other hand there is clearly a need for a term which isn't as tied to reductive definitions of traditional skills if we are to make sense of the range of processes and understandings that go into media production. This is not just a question of semantics, but of finding words to express a concept of learning to operate in culture, yet which is precise enough to relate to existing models of teaching and learning.

In summary, there are then, three important themes within the Cultural Studies tradition that I wish to carry forward. First of all there is the

relationship between consumption and production - or, as I would phrase it in the terms of this enquiry, the relationship between reading and writing. What is the relationship between the texts that young people produce and those they consume? Or to put this less abstractly: the television young people might watch and the videos they might make; the music they listen to or the fashion they wear and the 'style' they might design or put into magazines; or the films, books and comics they might read and the narratives they might make. And how is this relationship is constructed in terms of how writers *learn* to write? Does one need to be able to 'read' in order to be able to 'write', and in what ways?

Secondly, there are the political concerns of Cultural Studies: that is, the notion that popular culture (in whatever medium) constructs, mediates and/or represents power relations. Popular culture fundamentally operates at an ideological level - it enacts and embodies relationships of identity, ethnicity, gender, age relations and class. The genres of popular TV, soaps and sitcoms, teen magazines or subcultural musical tastes and affiliations are all sites where important ideological work goes on. This is not to suggest, along with Murdock (1997) ,that studies of the consumption of popular culture necessarily demonstrate an 'expressive individualism'. Rather, it is to argue that we need more thorough examinations:

of the ways that meanings and identities are negotiated socially, and [of] the ways that these grounded processes are structured by wider economic and ideological formations (Murdock 1997 pp. 63).

Thirdly, this tradition in Cultural Studies leaves us with a methodological dilemma, which I shall pursue in the next chapter. If forms of popular culture can be read on an ideological level, who is doing this kind of reading? How might academic students of popular culture know if this level of meaning is consciously 'intended' by those concerned? And what is the evidence for this? I shall argue that the media productions made by the young people I studied show that they *are* reading popular culture precisely

in these terms - as ideological work. Nevertheless the ambiguous *self-reflexive* role academic theory plays in the fabrication of levels of possible meaning needs also to be taken into consideration.

The research questions

As the previous section has suggested part of the theoretical problem my enquiry faces is trying to unify the concerns of studies of culture with theories of writing - that is to say, fitting together a model of the writing process (large enough to accommodate media production) with arguments about the wider culture. Although much of the work I have discussed throughout this chapter shares a common intellectual background, particularly in the emphasis on semiotics and the social production of meaning, it is difficult to synthesise its different frameworks and academic traditions.

First, I have to make the case that young people's media productions can be read by adults and the students themselves as a meaningful form of *culture*. I will explicitly address this methodological issue - of differing academic and youth perspectives - in the next chapter. My analysis of students' work within the school context needs to offer insight both into the ways that texts are put together - how they are written - and how they might have this wider cultural resonance. This therefore means integrating interpretative paradigms which traditionally have addressed themselves to different audiences. Work within the Cultural Studies tradition has been customarily oriented towards the macro perspective of theorising social power; whereas most work on writing aims primarily to inform current educational practice. In particular, studies of youth culture have often argued from a politically critical position, whereas educational studies

concerned with writing (though not so much, perhaps, with literacy) frequently tend to *a-politicise* the role of schools.

Furthermore, it will already be quite clear from the range of theory described so far, that *writing* can profitably be explored from both 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' perspectives. In his discussion of television literacy, Buckingham (1993 pp. 131-35) distinguishes between 'higher' and 'lower order' literacies; and I have already considered Messaris' attempts to construct a graded fourfold taxonomy. On one level, it is impossible to separate questions about surface accuracy and textual structure from the broader issue of meaning and expression, although very few bodies of academic enquiry continue to keep both perspectives in equal view. Thus, as I have already suggested, some of the work from the Cultural Studies tradition has made very broad judgements about meaning and society with very little attention to the mechanics of communication (e.g. Hebdige 1979). On the other hand studies of writing instruction rarely attempt to enter debate on the cultural terrain (e.g. Graves 1983). Burgess (1993) has argued the case for recent studies in English, recognising that the inclusion of non-schooled literacies within the curriculum would promote a new vision of a different social future; and drawing attention to feminist studies of women reading and writing as examples of 'classrooms as sites of cultural making' (quoting Hardcastle 1985). However, the 'gap' between traditions is also evident in the ways in which empirical evidence is utilised in support of their theoretical aspirations. It is only relatively recently, particularly from within the emergent 'critical literacy' movement (e.g. Gee 1996) that studies crossing this divide, have been published.

My starting point then, is the political and social processes at work within classrooms - the 'culturalist' approach. However, I have paid a considerable attention to studies of the writing process because my analysis of students' media productions aims to synthesise arguments about culture with those derived from this more detailed 'micro' perspective. This is in

effect one of my central hypotheses: that in applying models of language use and learning *to* media work I can make a grounded argument for the status and validity of students' cultural expression. And this hypothesis is premised on an expanded definition of literacies to encompass a broad participation in the wider culture.

What, then, might any such expanded theory of media literacy, or more specifically a theory of *writing media* look like in practice? It would be premature to put forward a fully fledged model of *media writing* at this stage - my aim in the discussion of students' media production in Chapters Four to Seven is to articulate such a model. Nevertheless, I wish to conclude this chapter by drawing together some guiding principles upon which we can build such a model. The preceding discussion suggests it might need to contain several dimensions at once. I want therefore to organise these principles around the areas of *pedagogy, text, production, and reception*. Finally, I will consider the position relationship between these principles and other theories of language and learning, especially those concerned with the notion of metalanguage.

Pedagogy

The discussion of visual literacy and the debate between the process and genre schools of writing pedagogy could be seen as another variation on the classic arguments, outlined in Chapter One, between progressive and traditional pedagogies. Both within the specialist fields of literacy studies and in the debates around pedagogy these positions are constantly being recapitulated and I do not want oversimplify the discussion here by imposing a structural dualism on all of these discussions. Nevertheless any theory of media writing needs to be able to articulate a relationship between what students already know and what they might need to be taught. The

relationship is likely to *recursive*, as students gain experience of media work. The work on writing in English also emphasises the relationship between students' knowledge of texts gained through *reading* and their ability to transform such knowledge through *writing*: and this dimension will also need to be borne in mind. Finally, any model of media pedagogy will have to pay attention to a specific concern - namely how to introduce the various media production *technologies*. The model needs to relate students' practical facility with such technologies to their conceptual competence in working with media forms and genres.

As I have suggested, the model of *bi-literacy* or the notion that learning to write is like using a second language seems most useful here. Following Kress's notion that writing is a kind of second language in relation to speech, I want to suggest that *writing* media requires explicit instruction, albeit carried out in such a way that pays careful attention to students' 'passive' knowledge gained from their reading.

Texts

Work in English and social semiotics emphasises that texts may be described in terms of codes, conventions and genres. Although some texts may be classified as more original, or creative, or expressive than others, their fundamentally dialogic nature - their use and appropriation of prior texts - seems to be a fundamental principle. Not only does this dimension return us to the relationship between prior knowledge (gained through consumption) and production but it also raises the prospect, strongly emphasised within the Cultural Studies tradition, of subversion. There it is argued that texts are often subverted and used 'improperly' or against the grain (de Certeau 1984). This approach has only recently entered into mainstream considerations of writing in English (e.g. Moss 1989) but if, as I am arguing, students are using media production as a form of cultural

expression then we should expect texts to embody the capacity to parody and speak with, or through, other texts. The texts students make will of necessity be hybrid and cross generic. We should also expect them to carry other levels of ideological meaning which go beyond simply fulfilling the narrower instrumental functions many educationalists ascribe to students' work. Learning to write is very much seen as part of a lifelong process, as young people can use their ability to write in their *later* working lives; whereas in media production what the text says in the present may be as much a concern for teacher and student as what it may suggest about other, future literacy practices.

Production

The inherently collaborative nature of much media production should translate directly to the model of classroom organisation advocated by the process school (Graves 1983). Media work seems intrinsically 'suitable' for the kind of production process described in the conference-drafting model of writing. On the other hand we have to take into account the precise effects of media technologies, both in the way they determine the production process and in ways that students may have to learn to become familiar with them. In particular the hierarchical and demarcated nature of tasks in media production seems to have more in common with the range of differentiated skills required in staging plays, for example, than writing texts. However, whereas most writing theorists imply that learning to write *by oneself* is the aim of teaching writing, it may be that in media education the production process in itself will continue to play a part as the object of the exercise, and not just as a means to the end. In other words *the process* may also embody meanings and significances beyond its function in the making of a product. In addition the explicitly social nature of production may also play a part in forcing students to be explicit about their formal

and informal knowledge in ways outlined above (see my discussion of Lorac and Weiss 1981 in the previous chapter).

Reception

Despite the influence of the 'writing for real readers' school, the dominant model of audience in English is profoundly at odds with that at work in the Mass Media. The Media Industries tend to make output for specific audiences, and frequently these audiences are defined in commercial terms. In English classrooms on the other hand, students tend to write pieces for individual readers - in the main teachers. In the present climate writing in English is often geared towards performance in examinations. Yet the common practice of asking students to play the role of professional media producers in schools and either to pretend to, or actually, create products for wider audiences may thus shift the model of audience away from the self/teacher dyad towards a more immediate, real and direct production context. Secondly the context of making media in school for peer audiences further changes the reader-writer relationship. Although the process school has advocated school students becoming publishers and sharing work beyond the teacher-examiner it is unclear how widespread such practices actually are. In a sense this has been one of the most difficult areas for teachers of conventional writing- to create audiences of real readers for real writing. On the other hand *writing* media may create the sense of peer audience advocated by this approach. The effect of writing for the peer audience needs to be carefully explored, as the students' social context may become a significant influence on both process and product. The cultural politics of the classroom - its intensely complex network of power relations - may also impact on what students write there - as well as how work might be read. Furthermore, the visual nature of much media output may make

the whole business of collecting peer response to writing much more immediate.

The linguistic dimension

In general I am suggesting that media production be viewed as working in a kind of second language: but whether it is labelled as a form of *literacy* actually seems to be a semantic issue, unless one is seeking to persuade those who do not support a concept of plural *literacies*. The characteristics I have just described clearly suggest a schooled and complex process of cultural production which meets all the criteria for literacy in the relevant fields of study. However these concerns do not engage with the set of arguments about the relationship of cognition to language, particularly those positions which maintain that all meaning is linguistic. Such approaches run the risk of devaluing other forms of communication and cultural expression. Nevertheless, I do not wish to muddy the waters by claiming the sort of primacy for writing media that can be made for print literacies. However, I will suggest that analysing the relationships between speech, thought and writing may be useful in order to show how *writing media* similarly echoes the process of translation and transformation within linguistic domains. This is not to suggest that the second-language nature of media work is second class but that it does depend upon, utilise and develop first language competencies. Indeed from this point of view I would contend that making media has an invaluable role in the development of meta-linguistic understanding.

Summary

This chapter began a conceptualisation of *writing media* by returning to the subject English because that subject offers a theory of language and learning in which we can situate media education. The notion of learning to be literate, of learning how to write, is self-evidently central to English - and other mother tongue language teaching. Such an approach to learning has not been central to media education until relatively recently, even if it has been implicit in the accounts of practice and debates about pedagogy as our study of media production in Chapter One showed.

Secondly debates about writing within English have struggled very hard to overcome a theoretical divide in definitions of what it means to be literate. Indeed it seems to me that underlying my discussion of media production and of literacy in both of these chapters lie a series of parallel oppositions. On a grand theoretical level these are between agency and structure and between self and society. On a slightly less abstract terrain there appears to be a conflict between notions of genre and expression; between grammar and meaning; and between form and content. Part of the challenge for this study is to find a way of synthesising these oppositions rather than replicating the conflict which has characterised discussions of literacy and of media production in the past. This is a daunting challenge because the political and theoretical positions underlying these oppositions remain all the more polarised in British education today.

In principle, however, I am arguing that if media education possesses a theory of learning it must include a model of literacy; and furthermore, that this model must encompass a developed theory of writing. At its simplest my developing model suggests that:

¶ Writing is a complex *process*. It cannot be reduced to the single act of making marks, but must include the *social* interaction between the writer

and his or her environment; especially the power relations of the classroom. The writer will move through many stages during the course of a piece of writing.

¶ The *audience* and *genre* of a piece of writing are the most important influences on its inception, production and reception. Neither of these categories are fixed. Genres may mutate and *hybridise* and changing genres may inscribe changing audiences.

¶ Writing may draw upon competence in one or more semiotic system or language at the same time.

¶ Studying the concept of *writing* must involve attention to both the writer and the texts produced.

Of course these are not fixed 'rules' in any sense, but merely derive from the foregoing discussion; and self-evidently all of these statements could be transferred to forms of production other than verbal writing. Of course, they may be inflected or even changed as we apply them to examples of media production. Indeed, in applying them to examples of young people's work, I will raise further questions. Can we employ an expanded notion of literacy to make sense of media learning? And if, within this expanded notion of literacy, we can include an expanded notion of writing, then in what ways might such an expanded definition of writing help us to reflect back on these original notions of the writing process? How might a theory of *media writing* affect the notion of print writing? Noting any such changes and developments is important for the broader claims of this study, that media education can transform the contemporary landscape of literacies within which young people consume and produce culture.

Rationale

In keeping with recent fashion, I want to begin this chapter about the methodologies I use in my enquiry with a brief autobiographical note (Nias 1993; Gillespie 1995). I wanted to undertake this research because I worked as an English and Media Studies teacher for just over six years at a comprehensive school in Tottenham, North London (1986-1992). I supervised or facilitated, with varying degrees of control, a number of media productions over that period as well as 'commissioning' a quantity of written work. Some of this work was in the day-to-day nature of coursework; some produced for examination purposes. As I indicated previously, there is a strong tradition within English that explores young people's writing in and for itself. This movement has even led to a number of publications of work by young people, most notably by the English and Media Centre (e.g. *Our Lives* 1979). Although this approach within English teaching has been strongly critiqued for its reification of an authentic *voice* (Moss 1989; Gilbert 1989), it encouraged a school culture that valued, or at least took seriously, the work of young people, their culture and their lives. However, my experiences of working within the inner city environment of Tottenham, coupled with this general professional orientation, led me to an interest in the *media* culture of my students - and also to a sense that it was more through media productions in media education lessons, than writing autobiographies in English, that this sense of self and culture was invested.

This is not to say that I took up this interest naively. As the following chapters will show, a greater attention to the web of social influences surrounding the consumption and production of media texts actually locates the individual within a complex interplay of social and historical forces. The

essential 'self' or individual voice, for so long central to English, is, I shall argue, far more of a social construct than that subject-discipline often assumes. However, despite the strong tendency in media education to ritualistically disavow its 'roots' in English¹, it would be disingenuous of me to suggest that it was not this broadly 'progressive' tradition within English teaching which motivated my enquiry in the first place (Burgess 1984b; 1993). Secondly, although (as we saw in chapter one), some attention has been paid to the media productions of young people as forms of cultural production (e.g. Dewdney and Lister 1988), this is not the dominant tradition in Media Studies. Indeed, as I have suggested, it is the examination context and the theory-led deconstructionist approach which is currently most influential. It was here again that the traditions of English, which (as I noted in the last chapter), thoroughly critiqued the teacher-in-role-as examiner, (Britton *et al* 1975), made me ask the kinds of questions about media production which are not usually asked in Media Studies.

There are two further traditions of enquiry which also sparked off my interest in this topic. First of all, I found that schools are actually interesting places for investigating media audiences. Collecting young people together actively creates forms of youth culture (Willis 1977; James 1993). Secondly, school provides a helpful environment for talking about media consumption (Buckingham 1993b). As I have already suggested towards the end of the last chapter, a broad interest in young people - as an important subsection of the mass media audience - also underlies this research. Studies such as those collected in Seiter *et al* (1989) or the work of Morley (1992), have identified study of the audience as fundamental for tracing the overall significance of the role of the mass media in modern societies. In general, this tradition in Cultural Studies argues that we need to locate the meaning of media texts in people's lives on the basis of

¹ For an example of emotion generated by this kind of disavowal see the issue of *Screen* 1986 Vol. 27. No. 5 including the debate between Buckingham and Masterman about the latter's 'Leavisite' heritage.

qualitative accounts of their readings of such texts. Schools, and the media education curriculum, thus provide a 'natural ecology' for such investigations.

In particular, research in this tradition emphasises the use of ethnographic methods to find out about the audience (e.g. Morley 1986; Morley and Silverstone 1991). This also has a number of resonances with the tradition of ethnography in educational research (Hammersley 1993a and b; Lutz 1993). Within the latter body of work, such methods have been used to describe the day-to-day, even minute by minute, transactions in classrooms and other teaching and learning situations. Besides this correspondence of methods between these two traditions there is equally a correspondence of purpose. The studies of writing discussed in the previous chapter were generated by a practice-led concern and contributed to an ethos which eventually became the 'movement' of action research (Stenhouse 1975; Carr and Kemmis 1986; Winter 1989). This approach advocated teachers carrying out research in order to *change* their practice. It emphasised teachers' professional and political control over their own work and in this respect it sought to validate the production of knowledge about teaching *by* teachers - as opposed to external researchers. This epistemological framework has many points of similarity with models of audience research which locate the meaning of media consumption within the orientations and meanings defined by members of the audience (see especially Fiske 1989; Liebes and Katz 1993).

In general, however, what connects these traditions is that they are both rooted in the qualitative paradigm. Action research and what has become known as the 'new' audience studies (Boyd-Barrett 1995) both cast a critical eye on the value of large scale quantitative projects. They have promoted the use of qualitative methods in order to produce different theoretical and interpretative approaches. These are frequently explicitly political, since, as Jankowski and Wester (1991) note, 'there are many

affinities between the qualitative tradition and research with an emancipatory objective' (p. 57). Thus, not only do both traditions share a common set of methods, but also a common purpose and set of values.

I shall be refining these arguments below, but in general it was my circumstances, initially as an English teacher, working within the professional framework of action research, and as a researcher carrying out Cultural Studies enquiries into the audience, that led me to identify the theoretical questions about writing and media production I have described in the previous chapter. The work described in the rest of this thesis draws substantially from my time at the school in Tottenham: although the work in Chapter Seven draws from a slightly different context when I was working in a neighbouring school in an advisory capacity alongside classroom teachers, carrying out a piece of funded research (see Buckingham, Grahame and Sefton-Green 1995). I will thus describe the school context as well as the processes of data gathering and data analysis in more detail to flesh out my central methodological problems.

In this respect I shall draw on the framework identified by Hitchcock and Hughes (1989), who list several fundamental dimensions that need adequate justification in order that any piece of research can claim significance. These are the research's *reliability*; its *validity*; its *representativeness*; its *generalisability*; its *relevance*; and its *originality*. Of course concern with these issues stems from arguments about epistemology within the social sciences - the claims of any kind of social scientific research to produce objective truth: (see especially Cohen and Manion 1994). Again this debate within the field of educational research is almost precisely paralleled by work within the qualitative tradition in communications studies. Here, for example the work of Jensen, Jankowski and Wester (1991) makes the case that the *interpretative* tradition within Cultural Studies can offer philosophically grounded and verifiable findings about the nature and meaning of the mass media. On the methodological

level, then, I would want to make the modest claim that the work represented in this enquiry may go some way in drawing together these two research traditions.

The School Environment

The main location for my enquiry was a mixed county comprehensive school situated in the shadow of a famous football stadium in Tottenham, North London. The local education authority, Haringey, covers one of the most socially deprived areas of the country, and at the time of my research the parliamentary constituency where the school is located had the highest level of male unemployment on record. The school thus drew from a predominantly working class clientele; though the incidence of lone parents and unemployment - as indicated by the poverty index of free school meals - would also suggest that the school drew from the sociologically problematic area of the 'underclass'².

The school was also very mixed in terms of ethnic origin. A snapshot survey undertaken into one year cohort, coupled with my insider's knowledge (from a position of pastoral authority as a deputy head of year), indicated that about one third of the school was white, a third Afro-Caribbean and the rest were either Mediterranean (mainly Turkish) and Asian (see Chapter Two Buckingham & Sefton-Green 1994). Indeed, over twenty home languages were spoken, so it is fair to describe the school population as diverse. However, in keeping with the wider fragmentation of British society in the inner cities, the school was not equally mixed in terms of class composition: there were very few middle class students. For example, within the A-level group who provided the work described in Chapter Six, only one student's parents were in conventional middle class

² See Osbourne (1995) for a critique of this term.

occupations - teaching - and he probably attended the school only because it offered opportunities for integrating severely disabled students into the general population.

The second school at which I carried out the work described in Chapter Seven was located only a few miles away from Tottenham. Nevertheless, it was significantly different. It was single sex (girls only) and because of this had a more identifiable Muslim population. It was also considerably more mixed in terms of social class, and there were fewer Afro-Caribbean pupils at this school (probably up to ten percent).

The demographics of both school populations provide significant, though not exclusive, indications of the scope and nature of youth cultures prevalent in both communities. My study is not an ethnographic account of forms of youth culture in the tradition of Jones (1988) or Gillespie (1995), nor does it attempt an anthropologically oriented exploration of school life (James 1993; 1995; Caputo 1995). Nevertheless, I worked closely with the young people in my study over an extended period and to an extent built up trust with many of them. I would not, however, unlike Gillespie, seek to 'neutralise' the way I was positioned in relation to my students, or particularly pretend I had privileged access to their lives. I remained the class teacher, even in the second school, and therefore clearly recognise the power differentials between my position and those of my students. It is for this reason that I would be also be cautious about describing my work as *ethnographic* (see Hammersley 1992). I was neither an observer or used informants in the manner of traditional ethnography. I was in a position of authority; but whereas traditional ethnographers have to rationalise their work *to* their sources, teachers are expected to ask students about their work, and indeed encourage them to produce it. This has the effect of naturalising the teacher-researcher's 'closeness' to student-sources; though I would not wish to efface the knowledge/power relations implicit in this situation.

However, unlike the work of Morley (e.g. 1986) or Buckingham (e.g. 1993), where the researcher needs to account for their own presence as they account for the audience's interpretation of texts, my work has different aims³. Although the nature of these students' lives is obviously an influence on their work and on what they say and do during the process of media production, this research is ultimately attempting to derive a model of literacy and learning rather than to generate a 'thick description' of student cultures. It is therefore important to be able to make the case that broader arguments about teaching and learning can be generalised from my observations.

I want to note one final caveat here about my role as the class teacher for these studies. In general my focus here is on students' learning and on what they make - the *media writing*. Of course it is very difficult to separate this attention from a consideration of my teaching, so all the case studies contain accounts of my input and the ways in which it is or is not typical of a certain kind of media teaching (especially in Chapters five and Six). On the other hand this study does not contain the range or possess sufficient comparative data to sustain an analysis of media teaching in general. That would require accounts of other teachers in other classrooms (although I would note that I do bring an informed awareness of these to this study from my experiences of working in Initial Teacher training, A-level Media Studies examining and teacher research groups). My aim here is to be explicit about how my teaching provided the *context* for the students' work I describe. As will be seen, my teaching here was rarely highly direct, or interventionist: it mainly takes the form of establishing projects for the students and then monitoring and supporting their ongoing work. Again, I am not claiming that these studies offer models of good practice, simply accounts of students' writing. It is important to note the

³ See also for example, Marcus' (1986) critique of Willis' (1977) classic ethnographic account of school life *Learning to Labour*, for an explication of the ethnographer's dilemma in (re)presenting research.; and Walkerdine (1986).

part I played in these, but in general I direct my attention to an explication of the products and the students' understanding of the process of production. Only in Chapter Seven do I try to account for the production process in any detail and this is because the focus of that case study was much more directed towards pedagogic questions. In this sense the conclusions I draw in Chapter Eight, which offer suggestions about ways to organise media teaching, are based on my analysis of the students' *media writing* (and the students' *post hoc* written accounts) and *not* directly on an analysis of my teaching.

The Data

Although I have suggested that the tradition of action research provides a framework for this enquiry, this is not to say that my work strictly followed the research procedure identified in the key texts of that movement. For example, Cohen and Manion (1994) summarise a step-by-step process - incorporating data collection, reflection, piloting and interpretation - which has become institutionalised within this research tradition. As will be seen, my research is not organised in this way, even if I share similar goals and commitments to the notion of teacher as researcher. Significantly (with the exception of the story described in Chapter Four), the fact that all of the students' work I use was the result of curriculum development - in that it was the first time all of the units of work were taught - takes it outside of the norm. Both from the students' and the schools' perspective, media work was new and its newness is important, making it almost experimental by definition. The fact that I was also interested in the data as evidence of audience interpretation, within the tradition of audience research in Cultural Studies, also means that I did not embed its collection and

interpretation within the action-research cycle but wanted to know what it might 'say' about my students' media usage.

Indeed, from an educational research standpoint, it might therefore be more accurate to describe the methods used to *collect* the data as belonging to the case study model of research. This has been defined as 'a study of an instance in action' (Walker 1993 pp. 165). Walker provides a helpful and thorough review of the central issues within this type of research, questioning the tendency to interpret data naturalistically and for the researcher to become over-involved. My responses to some of these problems are described below. Walker concludes that for case studies to be effective 'it is implicit....that there is no one true definition of the situation' (p. 192). This multiplicity of perspectives is best ensured through the collection of data from multiple sources; a solution also advocated by Schofield (1993) in his attempt to increase the generalisability of qualitative research. The fact that there are four different case studies within this thesis, each employing distinctive approaches, further supports the idea of a research *mosaic*, affording an appropriately eclectic mix of methods and analysis.

On the other hand, from within the Cultural Studies tradition, there are fewer types of standard research model against which empirical research can be measured. There are, quite simply, fewer studies of media audiences than there are of classrooms. This is not to say that audience research is methodologically naive, or that it is without a secure basis in social science research, but that it has fostered the speedy growth of innovative means of data collection before any one method has become institutionalised. Thus, for example, small and medium sized group interviews (e.g. Morley 1981), surveys, focus group discussions (e.g. Liebes & Katz 1993), unstructured and structured discussions (e.g. Buckingham 1993), ethnography/participant observation, (e.g. Jenkins 1992), using reader's letters (e.g. Ang 1985) etc. are all methods which have all been

used. The underlying characteristic of this work has been an attempt to *textualise* the data, whether it be Ian Ang's (1985) letters about watching *Dallas*, Henry Jenkins (1992) fan videos about *Star Trek*, or discourse analysis of talk about television (e.g. Buckingham 1993). To an extent attention has been directed more towards turning the evidence into a *text* - and the accompanying methods of textual exegesis - than towards the mode of data collection. For example the obvious 'methodological' limitations in Dick Hebdige's work (1979), relying as it does on anecdote and journalistic reportage, has attracted virtually no comment: yet, this absence has not detracted from its influence as a seminal text in Cultural Studies (see Garnham 1986 for an 'in principle' discussion of this problem).

I have employed a notion of discourse analysis derived from Potter and Wetherell (1987) or Fairclough (1989) to make sense of the texts of students' media production. Both of these studies argue that language is already structured and deployed in ideologically loaded discourses. In particular they argue that language cannot be read transparently or realistically as a means of generating insights into thoughts or intentions, but should be seen as being organised by the power relations contingent on the circumstances of use. Thus, to take an obvious example, discussion between teachers and students is always mediated by the expectations and languages which comprise social relations within the classroom. I utilise this model of communication in several ways. First, when recounting interviews or conversations with student authors I am reflexive about the discursive nature of such talk. Such data has to be filtered through a number of contingent possibilities. For example, what is said may not be what is meant; and indeed what is meant may be predetermined by the context of child talking to adult, or student to teacher, female to male and so on (for example in the case of my lunch time discussions with the author of the story I discuss in the next chapter). Secondly I apply this model of discourse analysis to students' writing. When looking at work produced for

examination purposes or assessment I also try to identify the discursive forms inherent in the nature of the writing task: an example here might be in my analysis of the pieces of writing accompanying the *Cosmopolitan* parody discussed in Chapter Six.

There are basically four kinds of data discussed in the following chapters: work by young people (the *media writing*); observation from the classrooms where the work was produced; interviews and discussion with the *authors* of the work; and records or writing by these authors about their work - most frequently produced for examination purposes to accompany the work. (The practical methods used to collect this range of data are fairly self-evident: tape-recording, field diaries and notes supplement the use of pupils' work itself.) However it is also fair to say that it is difficult to gather comprehensive data on teaching and learning in the course of media productions. Much classroom interaction is relatively disorganised, particularly during production itself. In particular, the fact that small groups may be working in a large space at the same time, or often out of the classroom, makes it difficult to keep accurate notes. Similarly, some of the best student work may take the form of engrossed conversation around the practical challenges of production, which may not only occur out of earshot but is often opaque to the outsider. Nevertheless, informal observations by students were recorded (in field diaries) and offered helpful ways of shedding light on their intentions and thinking during the writing process.

In general, informal observation and discussion encourage the students to make comments and offer insights which might otherwise have been lost. Certainly the work of Edwards and Mercer (1987) is influential here in discerning, within the cacophony of the classroom, particular discourses of teaching, learning and communication. Their analysis of studies of classroom discourse clearly advocates an attention to the formal discursive features of classroom interaction leavened with a concern with *content* - that is, they argue, where *educational* transactions may be

observed. This model is based on the work of Barnes (1969), which maintains that the process of teaching and learning are deeply embedded in the communication between teacher and students as well as student and student. For example, the way I picked up remarks about grammatical understanding in photo-stories (see Chapter Five), derives from this research tradition.

The fact that there are four kinds of data helps us to assess its quality and significance through the simple process of comparison. This process raises a number of fundamental questions. First, I want to ask to what extent the data might be representative and reliable. In other words, is it typical or unusual? Secondly I want to know whether these four kinds of data *triangulate*. Do the classroom observations substantiate the writing; do the interviews support or undermine the claims of the media production; and so forth? Thirdly, by implication, I need to consider the 'truth status' of the data. Can the classroom observations be taken at face value; in what ways might the constructed nature of the interviews bias the content; is the writing mediated or can it be read transparently?

This last question raises further issues. It shifts the emphasis away from questions of reliability - the extent to which the data possess ontological integrity - to the ways they might be deployed in developing a theoretical argument. If the writing cannot be *read* transparently then how is it to be interpreted? Although, as I have indicated above, the issue of reflexivity on the part of the researcher during the process of data collection may not seem as fraught as it can be within the ethnographic tradition (see Walkerdine 1986), it exists nevertheless. In particular the question of how I might interpret or make valid readings of students' work will become progressively important as the thesis proceeds. The most effective way to answer this question is to explore the differences between the categories of data used in this study, and the ends to which it is put in the process of theory-generation.

Three of the four kinds of media writing were produced as forms of school work. At one extreme the magazine produced by A-level students in Chapter Six was made in response to an examination brief. The young women were required to make a media production in order to achieve a percentage grade in their formal assessment. On the other hand, in Chapter Five, we have a 'softer' form of assessment. Here the year 10 students produced photo-stories as part of on-going coursework. The work *could* have been part of a folder submitted for assessment, but as it was the first piece of practical work completed during the course, it was unlikely it would be. Nevertheless, the fact that it could have been formally submitted may, as I shall show, be relevant to their interpretation of the task. In contradistinction to both of these positions there is the work produced in Chapter Seven. This was carried out during English lessons (not, as in the other two examples, in the academic discipline of Media Studies). Not only was the procedure of making media new for these students, it also in itself carried no merit for examination: the work was merely a pretext for writing or oral work - the kinds of material usually submitted for assessment in English. Finally, the work analysed in Chapter Four was a story written by a student over a summer vacation and handed to me for opinion and advice. The story was intended (apparently) to be submitted to a film studio as a script in order to raise funds to pay for the author's trip to America. On the face of it this is eccentric and considerably different from the normal practices of school writing.

The contexts and purposes of all of these pieces of work are thus significantly different. If I then factor into this account questions about the students' *experience* in working with the different production technologies, their *expectations* about using the equipment as well as the *aims* of these activities, and their *enthusiasm* or motivation to carry them out, a complex picture emerges. Nevertheless, the methodological issues here are not, as it might first seem, solely questions of typicality and representativeness - is

the data unusual or average, is it a fixed *sample*? - questions that might seem to imply statistical kinds of answers. Theories of qualitative research constantly stress that 'the relevance of a specific methodology depends, above all, on the particular purpose and area of inquiry' (Jensen 1991 p. 6). They argue that research methods generate theoretical frameworks, and that the 'qualitative-quantitative traditions [] tend to emphasise different types of theory' (p. 7). This notion of a *different kind of theory* is the key point here. Some of the data may very well be unusual, but I will argue it gives an insight into the process of cultural production that could not be achieved by other means.

Media production: accounting for the text

As I have already suggested, much work in Cultural Studies derives its validity through performing kinds of textual analysis on media products and/or audience response. Thus un-conventional *texts*, e.g. shopping malls and clothing, are often treated in the same way as traditional texts, e.g. TV programmes; but equally audience *readings* of media texts are subjected to linguistic analysis. Audience talk, in particular, has been subjected to the rigours of discourse analysis. However, although it is now accepted that talk about, for example, TV programmes does not offer transparent insight into the meaning of the particular programme under discussion, and that the social process of talk codifies and to some extent determines the meaning of that text, it is comparatively rare for audience researchers to use textual forms other than talk in their analysis.

Indeed, virtually the only area of audience research which has examined other kinds of texts is that which focus on 'fan cultures' (e.g. Lewis and Jenkins 1992). There is a sense in which it is productive to view some of the work I describe in this way. Indeed, the Madonna videos or Star

Trek novels described by Jenkins (1992) or Fiske (1989; 1992) raise even more acute methodological questions about typicality and representativeness. The claims made for the fan production in those accounts are, however, relevant to my study. Fiske writes of the videos produced by Madonna fans that:

..a textual analysis.....does indeed reveal features that accord well with ethnographic investigations into the way that people make popular culture out of mass-cultural products, and that support theorisations of this process. (Fiske 1992. p. 46)

He argues that the fan differs from the 'normal' audience member in degree rather than in kind and that the excessive nature of the fan production offers a particularly clear insight into the normal processes we all use to make sense of popular culture. This argument has influenced my sense of the value of young people's cultural productions, as in some ways they read like fan texts.

A second use of audience texts within Media Studies is exemplified by Philo (1990). He asked differing groups of viewers to *make* News programmes in order to gain an insight into those groups' reading of the News. Strangely enough Philo does not explain how the textual features of News programmes in themselves could determine his focus groups' interpretations: his object of study was the *content* of the News and he rather exclusively pays attention to this as if it might exist outside of the form of News programmes (see also Morrison and MacGregor 1993).

However, I pay attention to both dimensions in my analysis. The story in Chapter Four, the photo-stories in Chapter Five, and the magazine in Chapter Six all demonstrate students' understanding of those media forms through their ability to re-form generic codes and conventions. Thus my reading of these student texts pays particular attention to notions of genre, intertextuality, grammar and so on; all of which are, in general, derived from structuralist and post-structuralist traditions. For example, in

Chapter Four I identify forms of borrowing, reference and parody from *original* media output in films and comics. I found that the best way I could make sense of this student text was to use the author as an informant in order to excavate the intertextual references of his work in this way. Indeed, identifying its sources and persuading the author to offer his interpretation of them was a kind of exercise in textual archaeology.

The experience of working with an author in this fashion helped to determine both my teaching and my understanding of student work in subsequent research. In many ways this study acted as a pilot and helped clarify the best methods of making sense of the variety of data I was collecting. The author of the story in Chapter Four persuaded me that close reading of sentence structure, proper names, plot type and narrative structure were all possible levels at which I could identify student readings of popular media culture. In effect, I used the methods associated with the school of Genre studies in Film theory (Neale 1980; Cook 1985): this offers a tradition of identifying the underlying structures of genres - in terms of plot, style, story, iconography etc.- and relating a comparative study of them to wider sets of assertions about meaning.

In the work on photo-stories, in Chapter Five, I again found that I would make a reading of genre, identify iconography or plot type, confirm and discuss my reading with the students and then analyse the work in greater depth. Thus, for example, the ways in which some of these artefacts became racially coded were indicated by the use of cultural form (e.g. hip hop graffiti), but it was in discussion and close reading of the text with one of the authors, that the broader meanings of that text began to take shape. In addition, I used some of the methods associated with narrative theory in my approach (see Rimmon-Kenan 1983; Branigan 1992). This body of theory identifies elements of 'deep structure' in the content of a story's development and looks closely at the relationship between the content of a narrative and the ways it is told. This was particularly helpful when looking

at the way in which the authors of these photo-stories conceptualised and then produced their narratives. On the other hand (following Fiske 1989), some ideological dimensions of the social meaning of these student texts were only apparent through observation, such as the carnival (Bakhtin 1968) surrounding a girls' group version of *The Chippendales*.

I have described both Genre and Narrative theory here in somewhat 'structuralist' terms, that is, in terms of their underlying organising systems or standardised formal features of style. However, this is not to suggest that such theories are only useful in talking about form. Indeed my analyses of students' work pays considerable attention to questions of *content* - the stories the students tell, the characters they create and the narratives they are interested in. Of course I try to find thematic significance in my discussion of content and relate it to larger generic and narratorial patterns, as in my discussion of the *masculine* pleasures in the boy's story in Chapter Four. However, studies of the writing process are frequently more concerned with formal qualities at the expense of a balanced interest in content, obviously because the *process* of writing is conceptualised in formal terms - controlling sentences, constructing arguments, etc. My studies will show how an interest in content goes to the heart of the writing process because an attention to the specificity of content is, I shall argue, *equally important* as an understanding of process. Paying balanced attention to both aspects of analysis ensures a more holistic approach to the nature of media writing.

Finally here, I found that encouraging students to talk about their initial conceptions of photographs, then their finished work and, in some cases also their sources, focused attention on the issue of *grammar*. This identified an explicitly linguistic dimension to their work, and one which frequently operated at a meta-linguistic level. Richmond (1990) develops a principle of learning about language, deriving from the idea of translation between language modes. His argument is that through talking about

reading, or reading about writing and so on, students learn to reflect upon the processes and structures of language - and I would argue, other forms of semiotically structured communication. Similarly, this study make use of *reflections* on the process of making media, both in spoken and written forms in order to develop a related perspective on young people's media productions.

However, the most persuasive argument about the poly-dimensional meanings of student texts comes from one the of most complex pieces discussed in this study, namely the Year 13 parody of *Cosmopolitan* (see Chapter Six). This piece contains range of textual features, all of which meet a classical definition of parody (Rose 1993). The parody magazine teaches the uninitiated reader that the text is imitative - and this case, subversive - of an original textual form. Again the macro narratives, micro level language and imagery, as well as a rich vein of semiotic activity in the visual dimensions (the use of colour and composition), draw attention to the complex process of signification going on in student work.

Of course, although my initial orientation in analysing all of these texts may have been derived from observation or discussion with the authors, this is not to say that I did not refine my reading of their work further in the context of my own theoretical interests. Thus, for example, my use of Judith Butler's (1990) work around gender as feminist masquerade in relation to this magazine, clearly exceeds the level of theoretical discourse explicit in the media product, even if such theories are exemplified by the students' work. Likewise, I use Fiske (1987) analysis of masculinity in Chapter Four, and Walkerdine's (1984) discussion of girl's stories/ fantasies in Chapter Five.

Indeed, this move from student production to cultural theory remains the most problematic methodological dilemma in my study. As I have already indicated in my discussion of Hebdige's work (Chapter Two), this is a common and unresolved issue. How can broader ideological analysis be

sustained on the basis of empirical evidence? Cultural critics have been accused of rationalising their data in a *post hoc* fashion in order to support pre-existing theories (see Harris 1992). The assertions I make about students' work in terms of its expressiveness or ideological value are equally difficult to prove. It is less contentious to show students' understanding of, say, visual grammar (see Chapter Five), than to argue as I do in Chapter Four that the story under discussion shows the author's re-working of popular culture in order to articulate his masculinity. I accept that there is an element of literary criticism in this approach, in ways that do not trouble scholars within English: for example, Moss (1989) performs a similarly *subjective* reading of students' fictional writing in order to generate an ideological interpretation of their work. Whilst this approach is acceptable within that subject discipline (it is after all similar to Britton *et al's* (1975), readings of students' work as expressive or personal), it can seem somewhat exposed within a more sociological perspective. It is easy to dismiss critics' readings of evidence as a manifestation of their own point of view rather than of the subject's. This criticism is most advanced within contemporary anthropology (Clifford & Marcus 1986) which - as a discipline - has almost 'crumbled' (Clifford & Marcus 1986 p.2) in introspective self-doubt, so difficult has it become to sustain the edifice of interpretation. The drift to textualisation of culture has merely served to expose the fabricating nature of the cultural critic; 'to highlight the constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts' (*ibid.*).

There are no simple answers to these problems. I obviously acknowledge my role in constructing interpretations, but I also suggest that I write in this context from a position of considerable insider knowledge. After all, the inverse argument is important here: what can I bring to the evidence that outsiders cannot? Does not my position as teacher allow me insight into the qualities of affect and emotion which external observation could not provide - at least to the same degree? In other words, judgements

about how *personal* or *expressive* students' media work is, depend to an extent on what they say about it, how I interpret it, and how it is received. Each of these is potentially unreliable, yet there is a sense in which I am providing a kind of ethnomethodology - by making explicit students' *own accounts* of their productions. The students' work appears to mean something both for themselves and for the social audience within the school. Some form of interpretation is required in order to make sense of this phenomenon and an insiders' knowledge may be the best way to find appropriate explanations. At the same time, I do attempt to triangulate evidence. My chronological accounts of the production process are set against retrospective explanations by these texts' authors; and in turn my analysis of their composition (and verification of such interpretations by the authors) combine to produce something which approaches to a systematic account of students' productions.

Conclusion

As I have already indicated, I am attempting to account for the *process* of writing as well as looking at the *products* of writing. This approach is clearly indebted to the pedagogies of the 'conference-drafting' school, which drew attention to the development of writing abilities over time. It is a matter of some regret that although the work described in this thesis and in associated publications (see Buckingham 1990; Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994) is based upon research in one school over a four year period, there is still an absence of longitudinal studies in this field. Young people's media consumption might be studied profitably over a longer period of time; and an integrated project following media and other learning during school careers needs to be undertaken. One implication here is that a study of *media-writing* should be undertaken in parallel with the study of other

forms of textual production in and out of school. To an extent the present study does do this. My analysis of the story in the following chapter and of the relationship between academic reflection and the magazine in Chapter Six begin this approach. Nevertheless this whole area would benefit from sustained work over a longer period of time. Indeed, as I suggest at the beginning of Chapter Seven, as the research continued it became clear that further issues were emerging even as I worked on this thesis, and I had to 'return' to questions that, retrospectively, could have been 'answered' at an earlier stage in the enquiry.

However, even if this research is not as complete as it might be under ideal conditions it is important to recognise that it is virtually impossible to have complete access to the writing process. Some work was completed at home, some in silence or when I was not around; and although I spoke to the authors on the telephone several times during the magazine production (in Chapter Six) mainly to give advice on use of the camera, I was not of course privy to the range of influences that can go into a media production. Neither am I sure any research method would have the answer to this dilemma. Accounts of adult researchers visiting pupils' homes (e.g. Wood 1993) often read uncomfortably or comically. Strange adults 'hanging out' with young people, taking an academic interest in activities that the subjects might think of in terms of leisure and pleasure, seem unlikely conditions to find out anything more than the social oddity of the situation. To an extent I have to accept that I cannot ever find out about the totality of my subject. Indeed some studies of the audience (e.g. Ang 1989; Buckingham 1993;) have actively critiqued, and withdrawn from, such a daunting ambition, providing instead, carefully delimited accounts of the construction of meaning. For example, Buckingham's studies show how young people's understanding of Television is socially produced and circulated in talk - a medium he can have reasonable access to. However, I suspect that at times I reconstruct or infer aspects of the writing process

which I could not observe, and it is important to be clear about the differences between these hypothetical (or imaginative) moments and empirical observation.

The present study does not make any startling claims for originality of method even though my use of young people's media production as a form of audience research is different from other techniques and approaches more commonly used within Cultural Studies (Sefton-Green 1993). In general, I suggest that paying attention to forms of cultural production by young people changes the emphasis of discussion about the meaning or effects of the mass media in young people's lives. However, this study is relatively straightforward as a piece of educational research. It synthesises a number of research methods and traditions within the qualitative paradigm and attempts to generate a meaningful theory from specific contexts. On a technical level, my analysis of students' work may contribute to a better understanding of students' reading of the media. And exploring student productions may give insight into the teaching and learning process.

Of course it is difficult for me to imagine the uses of this study. Certainly any intervention within the media curriculum is a politically sensitive matter, but I would hope the present thesis will contribute to a broader re-formulation of the conceptualisation and practice of contemporary literacies. To that end the model of learning and writing I use in this study is rooted in a secure history of research and development within English teaching. In applying that model to a modern media education classroom, it is of course changed and developed; and I would also hope that some of the research methods I employ here may be of use in complementary situations.

Introduction

Each of the following chapters describes an example of students' *media writing*. However, the first of these, a piece of work called *Plaz Investigations*, written by a fourteen year old boy calling himself *Ponyboy*, is actually a relatively conventional piece of writing, in that it is a six thousand word 'story'. It was written, *Pony* told me, in the hope that his story might be turned into a film script and thereby raise the necessary finance to pay for his travel to America. Despite this ambition, or perhaps because of it, the story alerted me to a number of structural and generic features both in terms of content and process that I will argue are typical of forms of media writing. As I indicated in the last chapter, I worked on this story before beginning the media teaching which comprises the subsequent chapters, and the ways in which I made sense of *Plaz* also indicate my developing theorisation of students' media work. From this point of view my interpretations of the story and the process of its composition are more speculative than work in the later chapters which had the benefit of this 'pilot' study.

There are a number of key issues derived from the arguments in Chapter Two which I shall explore in detail in this case study. First of all I shall show how *Plaz* draws upon *Pony's* consumption of a number of media texts and in so doing, acts as a symptomatic indication of his personal investment in a range of masculine fan cultures. The case study then explicitly explores the relationship between students' *informal reading* of popular culture - in this case across a number of media forms including Film, TV and comics - and the uses to which that reading can be put in the process of writing. It tries to identify any general principles governing how

informal modes of consumption might be *transformed* in the making of more formal productions - in this case fictional writing. Of course, as I have already argued, this relationship between the informal and formal is central to any discussion of literacy. This study then, sets out to address one of my key research questions: how might students' written work 'articulate' their reading of media texts? At the same time this question poses a secondary methodological challenge: can student's writing act almost as a form of audience research and provide insight into the meanings and pleasures derived from consumption of the media?

This attention to meanings and pleasures also indicates how the reading/writing of popular forms of culture might operate in terms of students' identity and expression. A further concern then, is the extent to which forms of cultural production are *significant* for the young people themselves in ways that are often ignored in adults' perceptions of student lives. However, the significance of cultural production for young people is, in this instance, for the author himself, primarily because it seems to relate to his sense of self and particularly the dimension of gender. In this chapter I will examine the masculine genres and forms on which *Ponyboy* drew; and gender is a theme to which we will return to in Chapter Six when I look at the women's magazine produced by an all girl group.

This perspective derives from the work in Cultural Studies I drew attention to in Chapter Two. There I showed how studies of youth culture interpreted signifying practice in terms of social relations, and in particular the part which young people's use of culture plays in the construction of their identity: a process in which gendering is of course absolutely central (McRobbie 1991). This approach has already been influential in studies of the sociology of reading; see Gamman & Marshment (1988), Longhurst (1989), Bristow (1991). Such studies have also shown how real readers have been segmented by the market; thus issues of taste, the contexts of reading

and book purchasing etc. are all determined by issues relating to gender. I explore this theme quite broadly in this study and subsequent chapters.

Although I strongly attribute the significance of this piece of writing to the author's concern with his own identity, this is not necessarily the case with the other case studies - where a concern with identity is more outwardly focused towards a peer audience. Here I want to explore the relationships between the individual's sense of self and the ways in which that self can be produced through the consumption of popular culture genres. This approach then develops arguments around personal expression and individuality that I explored in Chapter One in relation to media production, and Chapter Two in relation to expressive writing in English. Although the author, *Pony*, is a highly idiosyncratic individual, I want to argue that his immersion in popular culture genres indicates the ways in which we can see the self as both an individual and a social construct. Whereas previous traditions in English pedagogy have been accused of reifying the individual voice through a form of essentialism (Gilbert 1989), I want to argue that the self can also be seen as a larger cultural and ideological construction; and from this perspective I want to argue that *Pony* is more typical than idiosyncratic. Whatever his foibles, his use of the wider culture indicates a larger social process relating to boys in general.

This tension between the individual and the social is part of the larger discussion around genre theory and literacy (Kress 1994; Gee 1996). In that body of work it has been argued that the writing is not a privileged means of expressing the self but necessarily draws upon the ways in which language is used socially. This dichotomy is also key to the use of genre theory in film criticism (Neale 1980) which developed the study of popular culture genres as a means of analysing wider social forces. I drew upon the methods associated with this approach (examining iconography, comparative plot structures etc.) to read the story here because I needed to find an approach that made sense of the data for me as an adult (and a

teacher). (Film) genre theory also identifies the problem, discussed in Chapter Two, that pure genres rarely exist; cultural production necessarily mutates and hybridises genres as it develops. On the other hand genre theory (from the literacy school) finds it more difficult to account for the process of generic mutation within the pedagogic domain. The idea that writing in school, and media writing especially, may have an inbuilt tendency towards hybridity is one of the research themes I identified earlier and is one I shall begin to explore in this chapter.

'Plaz Investigations'

The author of *Plaz*, Michael, had adopted the name Ponyboy Curtis from *The Outsiders* (the novel by S.E. Hinton) at the age of twelve. He had obstinately refused to be called anything else and wouldn't even answer the register during his English lessons (which is how I met him), unless called 'Ponyboy'. In the story which I discuss, he calls himself Plaz, and when he returns from the future at one stage his former friend Raymond recognises him as Pony, his 'real' identity, before he became a time travelling bounty hunter. In fact Michael isn't even Michael: he is Michaelis, a white boy of Greek Cypriot origin living in Tottenham, North London. The specific identity, family and ethnic origin of the author are relevant to this study and the adoption of several fantasy identities, signalled by his various name changes, indicates a serious investment in imaginary fictions which is crucial to an adult understanding of the meaning of masculine genres. It also raises the spectre of psychological disturbance and the way that boys, and certainly boys' culture, are constantly pathologized by teachers as a 'concern'. From 1986 onwards *Pony* produced seemingly endless epics for his English homework; but over the school summer holidays in 1990 he surpassed himself, turning up at the start of term with a six thousand word

'novel' *Plaz Investigations*. The full text of this novel is reproduced in Appendix One. As I mentioned in the last chapter, *Pony* himself justified his efforts in commercial terms. He hoped the piece would be turned into a film script and thereby finance an escape from his family and a trip to America.

Like most first novels *Plaz* is unfinished. It is in three sections and is a third person narrative, although at times the narrator explicitly ascribes authorial insight to the protagonist. *Pony*, it should also be noted, is not an accurate speller - English is not his home language - but I have transcribed the story as it was presented to me. The first chapter is entitled 'The choice' (crossed out), and describes how the Tottenham schoolboy Plaz ends up protecting an 'attractive brewnet', Sam, from kidnapping thugs who turn out to be the F.B.I. Reluctantly, Plaz rescues Sam and her friend Danual and escapes with them back to the future ('8963 ad.') where he becomes 'a free lance peace keeping agent' or 'bounty hunter'. The second and third parts entitled 'The wrong case' deal with an adventure where Plaz is hired by an image conscious and impotent police force to kill various gang leaders. His adventures take him through time and space, including a visit to 'his ex-home town tottenham' and he gains a mechanical or robotic arm in the process. A couple of pages before the manuscript breaks off he is employed on a third adventure to capture a gang who have escaped from a high security prison. He is, needless to say, successful in his mission and has many battles along the way where kills the major evil characters of that time, and various cyborgs and mutants.

The novel is generically derivative and explicitly references and borrows from a number of other texts. Many studies have commented on how readers mobilise intertextual references as part of the reading process; but seldom has this process of reading the reader's reading been so easy to demonstrate. Thus *Pony* was motivated to write the novel in the first place because: 'I was watching 'Escape from New York', yeh, um, and I thought the guy, yeh, that was in there [] Kurt Russell yeh, I thought he was a very

good character.¹ He then goes on to list the other major influences behind the story:

There's er *Death's Head*, *Dragon's Claw*, um *Blade Runner*, all the *Star Wars* trilogy, um *Terminator* sometimes. I didn't use that much of *Terminator* just about the war and the computers taking over and all that and er, what else? All those futuristic films. [] Suppose I'd better mention *Robocop*, uh, I got *Action Force* some of the comic *Action Force* like some of the ninja stuff.

Some of the references are just in the form of borrowing names: for example Plaz visits the 'dagerba system' (from *The Empire Strikes Back*) but doesn't appear to use any other qualities from the *Star Wars* context. Other references are direct quotes, like the mechanised/electronic arm from *Robocop*, or the phrase 'free lance peace keeping agent' from the *Marvel* comic *Death's Head*. As I shall show, these are significant adoptions at the level of meaning. Thirdly there are the borrowings of narrative structures and character types, such as the trope of the hero being used by a corrupt police force to carry out 'real' law enforcement.

What this wealth of references from a specific range of media output indicates is an intense involvement in certain kinds of fantasy. By choosing to identify with certain kinds of heroes and by selecting key moments and actions from his favourite films and comics, indeed by participating as it were within the storyline of *Plaz Investigations*, *Pony* is revealing the salient structures and pleasures of his media use and consumption. As I have already indicated, these can primarily be described as forms of adolescent boys' culture.

In this respect, trying to find out what might actually be the male pleasures in the kinds of texts described by *Pony* might be the obvious course of research. Yet, the relevant literature indicates, such research is rare (Moss 1989, providing a exception). This is in contrast to feminist

¹ *Pony's* own views on *Plaz* come from a series of interviews. See Chapter 3.

studies of women's culture (e.g. Ang 1985, Hobson 1982, Radway 1984 and McRobbie 1991) all of which have all offered detailed accounts of gendered, feminine readings of popular culture. However, analyses of the relationships between popular culture and theories of identity from a masculine perspective have been thin on the ground. The best known study of boys' culture in contemporary Britain is Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour*, which examined how boys 'resist' their schooling through 'laddish' behaviour as a way of preparing for work on the shop floor. However neither this study nor the few that actually explore adolescent culture (e.g. Twitchell 1990) really look at the affective or aesthetic aspects of boys' culture in the way that the feminist studies (above) do.

One of the few relevant pieces in the field is Fiske's (1987) study of *The A Team*, which examines structural oppositions within that text as a way of identifying masculine pleasure. It also offers a method with which I could approach *Plaz*. It shows that attention to oppositions, contradictions and generic conventions within the text - features which *Pony* had clearly absorbed from his reading - can generate an understanding of the place of gender in popular genres. In this context, gender may best be understood in the context of discursive and performative theories of identity (Butler 1990) which emphasise the fact that identity is socially constructed (Segal 1990). Whilst avoiding any notion of 'voluntarism', that individual *choose* their identities, I want to suggest that identity is a kind of work, that it is actively *made* by individuals in the material contexts of their lives. I suggest that the genres of popular culture provide significant materials for this work and that the space of *media writing* provides an important opportunity for it to take place. The analysis that follows thus pays considerable attention both to the generic and intertextual context of the story, but also to how *Plaz* retells some of the key tropes of masculine fiction. *Pony* is clearly interested in the *content* of his work and this is important for an understanding of these genres' appeal to him. As I

suggested in the previous chapter, divorcing the specificity of content from the details of generic structures may lead to a poor analysis of *writing*. I therefore needed to make sense of the 'story' first before beginning to hypothesise what might be the significance of writing it .

'Ready to take them on'

One of the key tensions in the narrative is that between description and action. This is modelled on the story's sources. In *Action Force*, *Wolverine* and *The Sleeze Brothers* for example, a large proportion of the narrative is dedicated to establishing the parameters of the fantasy world rather than describing the events of the fantasy. In that sense, more of the story involves getting ready than actually acting out the investigations or fights. This skewing of the narrative seems to have two distinct functions.

First, the story takes the way in which we *enter* fantasy extremely seriously. There is lot of pleasure in setting up situations, such as the mechanisms of time travel:

listen, me and my friend Danual came here from the future 7026 yrs in the future, wait let me finnish, In our time we that is earth found this crystal which opens doors through time when you pas an electrial current through it, (ll. 43-6)

There is also an enormous amount of sheer descriptive detail:

It has been one year since Plaz Hunter came to this time. (8963 ad) Plaz has become a private investigator and he owns a craft a set of guns which consist of an normal handgun which never leaves Plaz's side two daggers which are always atthe sides of his boots a fusion canon and one puls rifal with an under carage pump ~~at~~ ction grenade luncher and he's only 15years old. , Plaz is also a 8th level black blelt at 12 differerent martial arts such as karate, Te quan do, Ninjitsoo and

tichee. Plaz has to deal with the most dangerous ~~pee~~ kind of people like police don't have to deal with like gangs such as the mafear but in this time the mafear does not exist but we do have gangs much r more dangerous like THE KOO - VAKS MOB, TheNOMEAGO and The ~~Empire~~ Force (ll. 124-138)

Finding the right names for the right enemies and listing the various elements in his arsenal all indicate that it is important for the author that the story appears credible - though to whom, the audience of the writer himself or some imaginary American film studio moguls, is an issue to which we shall return. What this second extract also demonstrates is that this preparedness is also a form of empowerment, that the 'skilling' in martial arts and the detail of the weaponry is a way of being ready for anything. As *Pony* writes later in the story, after Plaz has lost his arm in a fight:

At the hospital they replacd Plaz's arm with a robot arm which has a built in ardour cuff a compter, weapons system and also anything Plaz could ever need and more. (11. 224-6)

The phrase 'anything Plaz could ever need and more' is revealing. First, it indicates an underlying anxiety that, however prepared Plaz might be, *Pony* might not be able to predict the kinds of eventualities he might have to face. This exposes a kind of paranoia at the heart of the adventurer or warrior, that however invincible he might be, there remains the possibility that somewhere, somehow there might be a greater power. This possibility is even more likely in a futuristic world where the human imagination by definition cannot know all probable outcomes. One explanation for the preference for this kind of setting, then, is that it articulates masculine paranoia. It is certainly more likely in an adolescent or boy's world where, however much in control one might be, or imagine oneself to be, there is always likely to be a greater power. Thus, the fantasy power of the child has an in-built recognition of his (or her) powerlessness compared to the power

wielded by adults. Either way, Plaz reveals his fears in the same moment he purports to be all powerful, thus bearing out Fiske's analysis that 'Masculinity becomes almost a definition of the superhuman, so that it becomes that which can never be achieved' (1987 p. 210).

This focus on being prepared, both as a proportion of the overall narrative as well as at key moments, directs the fantasy towards a model of heroism where the protagonist appears infinitely in control. This is *Ponyboy's* rationale for Plaz's eclectic martial arts training: 'Plaz is also a 8th level black belt at 12 different martial arts such as karate, Te quan do, Ninjitsoo and tichee.' The enormous popularity of 'Eastern' fighting skills with their associated magical and mystical powers has a long tradition within male genres, and they exercise an extraordinary hold over the adolescent imagination. The stories in *Action Force*, *Bad Company* or *Wolverine* contain similar periods of preparation; and the advertisements and 'profile' pages often carry information about such putative skills. For example in *Snake Eyes* we learn that 'the young master could hit what was the mark'. What *Pony* stresses is the mental control such skills confer, to the extent of compensating for physical weakness. Thus any vulnerability is redressed by being trained and skilled in such arts.

Pony: 'cos martial arts are usually like aggressive kind of sports yeh, but Tai Chi is more like a kind of meditation thing. It teaches you how to like, how to stay calm in situations and how to move with grace yeh. [He learnt all this from a TV documentary]. And it's like, how to move yeh, say you were going to punch someone (), you just go like that yeh, and have the same power behind that as you would if you were going to do a normal punch, know what I mean.

The superpowered punch described at the end of this extract is similar to the contradictions surrounding 'anything Plaz could ever need and more' analysed above. It indicates a reassuring capacity for external forces, in this case training rather than military hardware, to supplement

and redress material and historical powerlessness. As Plaz explains to the obtuse and ignorant police officer Browning towards the end of the novel:

his a" browning stopped to think, he atarted to clik his fingers "Nineja or Nin something away"

"Ninja" Plaz ~~corrected~~ said Plaz correting browning.

"Yeh thats it Ninja, anyway he's a ninja warrier, I think its one of those ~~unarm~~ unarmed combat things"

"Its an anchent Martal art, it gives you the abilaty to defend yours self agenst almost any weapon" Plaz said.(ll. 534-44)

The idea that being a ninja can make one more powerful than weapons reveals its psychological attraction. The ninja way of life initiates the powerless into a position of 'superpowerfulness' or 'hypermasculinity' through a ritualistic transformation of almost transcendent power (see Segal 1990). (Kinder (1991) compares this act of transformation to the cultural construction of masculinity in her discussion of how young spectators read *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* as a psychological quest for empowerment.)

'Some sort of trouble with a form of othoroty.'

Pony's fears of powerlessness also articulate his concerns about his relation to authority and more broadly, his perception of the relation of the individual to society at large. He seems to need to create an 'other' in authority in order to articulate his own sense of identity: 'say you get captured by people, right, and they search you for guns and all that stuff, right, and they take them offa you, right'. Why is one likely to get captured in the first place, and secondly who would be the 'they' constricting and imprisoning the protagonist? The emphasis falls on secret and hidden powers, on external forces that control and restrict. This is most evident in

his attitude towards the police and the way they represent authority. Indeed part of his motivation for writing the story in the first place stemmed from his enjoyment of *Escape from New York* (dir. John Carpenter 1981) and the attitude of its hero Snake Plisskin, played by Kurt Russell, to the police and criminality: as *Pony* said, 'well maybe I just like the character, the way he doesn't like the police and, um, he was a soldier and he was the best and then he turned criminal and all that.' In *Plaz* he is employed by an impotent and corrupt police force to carry out *real* law enforcement, as in the Carpenter film. However, there are some significant contradictions and anxieties surrounding *Pony's* conception of Law and Authority.

When *Plaz* arrives in the future, he sets up as detective; and in the first major case he solves he is employed by the 'I. E.A. (law Enforcement Agents (new F.B.I.))' to 'go after and kill the leader of the [] Nomeago gang'. The following conversation between himself and the I.E. A. officer takes place during the commissioning of this exploit:

"Why? Why don't you do it yourself?"

"Think about it *Plaz*"

"Oh yeh your the athoritis aren't you and because its murder it would make you lot look bad"

"No .No. Not murder, Questor has ~~comited a lot of crimes~~ he murdered more inocent people then you could ever imagin, so you see you'll be doing everyone a favour" (ll. 161-7)

Towards the end of the story *Plaz* is hired by another cop who is described as 'the kind of cop who hides behind a desk taking credit for other peoples work'. He is asked to capture a gang who have broken out of a high security prison and who has already lost an army in the pursuit of these criminals. However, *Plaz* is 'different from everyone', he is 'the best' and therefore more likely to succeed. This is directly borrowed from the plot line of *Escape from New York*, except that in the film the protagonist is ideologically

compromised by already being a war hero turned criminal. In *Death's Head*, *The Sleeze Brothers*, *Batman* and indeed virtually all of *Pony's* sources we can observe the same structure, where the work of the (virtually impotent) forces of Law and Authority is effectively carried out by independent individuals.

There are several tensions implicit in *Pony's* borrowing and adaptation of this theme. First, there is the way the notion of institutional corruption and weakness is set against a pure embodiment of justice in the shape of Plaz. Plaz is, of course, individualised, as opposed to the F.B.I. organisation: again, there is a tension between the weak forces of society and the strength of an individual man. The authorities are constrained by being accountable to public scrutiny whilst the hero is only answerable to himself. There is an ambiguity at the heart of these tensions between the values of pro-social behaviour and violent anti-social activity. Ironically the torn fabric of society can only be sustained by those forces which that society appears to marginalise and fear: the violent, the individual, the independent and the free (see Tasker 1992).

The key question about *Plaz Investigations*, therefore, seems to be why *Pony* adopts the role of justice in a society that appears to devalue that particular ethos. Whatever psychological purpose might be fulfilled by acting as an agent of murder and physical force, or whatever the thrill might be in having a robotic arm, *Pony* is deeply moral about his actions. In this respect, this reflects the contradiction inherent in the notions of masculinity circulating in these texts: the notion that one can equate the man with the individual. Thus, as Fiske (1987) argues, the striving for achievement which characterises male genres is part of the way capitalist patriarchy motivates men to work in order to prove themselves. To prove oneself, one must be defined in opposition to the mass and therefore rebelling against authority becomes a way of defining oneself. This might explain why it is necessary that the symbols of authority are emasculated,

and that the virility of the various police forces Plaz encounters is open to question. Their weakness defines him.

However, there seems to be yet another contradiction in the role of the hero of these genres. Society is emasculated and left vulnerable, it comes under threat from anti-social elements, yet those elements can only be defeated by a more powerful force which is similar in kind to the anti-social. In other words, masculinity is torn between asserting itself in relation the larger whole, and in doing so, destroying it. Society can only be protected by a privileged version of its anti-social impulses in the figure of the hero. This is why Plaz is outside the law. He becomes, in *Pony's* favourite phrase borrowed from *Death's Head*, 'a freelance peace keeping agent' or 'bounty hunter' as the uninitiated would describe it. The heavy irony in this phrase embodies the ideological contradictions of this role and gives some insight into how the person of the hero is fraught with anxiety, doubt and multiple identity.

'At least I'll die Knowing I tryed to be someone o.k.'

'Trying to be someone' underpins the rationale for the whole story. But the salient question to ask, given the fraught uncertainties surrounding the person of the hero is: who is that 'someone'? In the previous section I looked at how *Pony* defined himself in relationship to the social body: but he also defines himself internally, in relation to the contradictory tensions within the masculine persona. Fiske (1987) analyses the four characters in *The A team* in terms of the separate elements that combine to form the contradictory whole of masculine identity. The relationships between the four characters, Mr. T., Face, Murdock and Hannibal thus bring into play 'a structure of masculinity' that give the programme its ideological meanings. Similarly, examining the other characters in *Plaz Investigations* brings an

equivalent 'structure' into the open. Of particular importance here is Plaz's relation to his enemies, allies and his previous incarnations as *Pony*.

The ease with which it is possible to construct binary oppositions between Plaz and these other characters must reflect a common narrative structure within masculine genres, and the material put forward by *Pony* as source and inspiration for *Plaz*. In virtually all the sources a common feature emerges: that of an opposition either between the different aspects of the split personality or between the protagonist and his enemy. For the former, *Wolverine* provides an excellent example; and for the latter, *Batman* and *Dragon's Claws*, though one could pick any of the texts referred to above to prove the point. In *Wolverine*, the hero Logan is transformed into a beast with an adamantium skeleton through the intervention of either 'Lady Deathstrike' (the daughter of a Japanese scientist) or the Canadian government. Either way, the hero leads a schizophrenic life as a 'super-soldier' combating his bestial impulses in order to serve as part of a superhero team, many of whose members, like 'the Hulk' (in reality Paul Cartier, victim of a supernatural curse) also embody this dual identity.

In the new Batman stories, in particular *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Batman becomes increasingly aware that the Joker isn't so much an independent criminal force as his alter ego. As the story progresses, the similarities between Batman and the Joker become more and more obvious: they are both mutated, through dress, self-discipline and, in the Joker's case, acid; both are outside society; both contain anti-social impulses, that Batman is forced to repress for the social good; etc. On this basis it has even been argued that Batman declines into a kind of existentialist introspection as he realises that what appears to be a moral struggle is more a question of trying to find transcendent meaning in a postmodern world (see Pearson and Uricchio 1991). In *Dragon's Claws* the various 'teams' in an international game have turned to crime and the Dragon's Claw team are matched against the others in their efforts to free the world from crime, and

incidentally win the final game. There is thus a hidden bond between the forces of good and evil and this throws some doubt upon the psychological integrity of the hero.

There are various manifestations of this narrative structure as Plaz proceeds through the course of the novel. As we have already seen, Plaz is contrasted with the stupid police officers, but he is also implicitly and explicitly defined against a range of other identities. Primarily, masculine difference is established in relation to the feminine; and there are two female characters in the story who fulfil this function. First, there is Sam 'the brewnet' whom Plaz rescues at the beginning of the story; and secondly Kim, a girl 'he use to like a lot', who is kidnapped as a hostage to trap Plaz on his return to Tottenham and who rescues Plaz at a vital moment before he has to leave her in tears as he returns to the future.

Both fulfil obviously passive roles, both have to be rescued, and both are described in terms of physical attributes e.g. the 'brewnet'. However, although Sam may begin the novel as an irritatingly needy female - 'look I gave you a lift that's all it doesn't mean I'm your friend your gardian or what ever O.K.' - a reference that implicitly places Plaz in the superior role of being in charge - she changes as the novel progresses and she becomes Plaz's assistant. Perhaps having an un-gendered name gives the game away. Sam becomes the person he asks advice from as he embarks on his adventures and she alternates between maternal rebuke and giving him the choice in these matters. He does tend to walk out on her as his way of ending debate but she plays a physical role in some of the adventures and as long as she doesn't upstage him, she can also kill and fight. In a sense she is necessary as a measure of his ability: a male assistant might be too threatening. Sam is thus a necessary device for *Pony* to define himself. By choosing Sam as the embodiment of those qualities *Pony* despises (worry and fussing) and allowing the narrative to recuperate her, *Pony* uses Plaz

as way of proving grown ups (is it too fanciful to say Mum here?) wrong and thus of acknowledging his own status.

Kim, the other woman in the story, is far less problematic. She is introduced as 'a girl Plaz use to like a lot', who was upset at his disappearance into the future. She is used as a conventional romantic heroine. When she rescues Plaz at a crucial moment she breaks down in tears and has to be held in his arms. She even blows him a kiss as he departs and Plaz realises that 'she must really like him'. She functions as a fictional way for *Pony* to live out what I suspect is a fantasy about a specific person. He can bask in her interest in him without having to expose any vulnerability on his part: he can then disappear back to the future having solved a romantic conundrum, but without having to commit himself. The fact that she breaks down when she has to kill a villain in order to save him only serves to intensify the fact that he is impenetrable to weakening emotions of this kind. She too thus acts as way of confirming his male strengths.

In *Batman* and *Escape from New York*, the hero is measured against the villain, respectively the Joker and 'the Duke'. In *Plaz* the main adventure involves the destruction of a gang, 'flaming fist' whose main leaders, Questor and Kelgor, are not described in any detail. (At the end of the novel where Plaz is employed to catch a gang of escapees, these villains are endowed with a variety of specific characteristics, Ninja skills, physical strength etc., more in keeping with the classic 'manichean' binary opposition of the genre). However, the actual moment of victory in the deaths of both Questor and Kelgor is notable for the roles played by the cyborgs and troopers that guard their leaders. This is perhaps a surprising shift in *Pony's* reading of his primary material and a curious twist to the binary opposition between hero and villain. First of all, the actual description of Questor is balanced by that of his bodyguard:

A great big guy said obviously the leader Questor he had a scar on the right side of his face and a silver glove with spikes on the left hand and his left stood a great big 6ft s cyborg who had muscles on his muscles and sword on his back and two mini rockets on his left cuff. and a double barrel laser gun on the ~~right~~ other. (ll. 214-18)

It is the cyborg who blows Plaz's arm off, leading to its mechanised replacement; and when Plaz kills Questor, it is, according to the conventions of the genre, an impersonal act (blowing up his spaceship). However this leads into a duel with the cyborg, because although Plaz expected the cyborg to stop serving Questor when Questor was killed, Questor's legacy was to endow the cyborg with a mind of its own after killing whoever killed its master. (This is symmetrically balanced by the troopers' response after Kelgor's death: they feel they are no longer bound to serve him after he has been killed). The cyborg's independence is pertinent for two reasons. First, it implies a relatively democratic relationship between master and servant (in terms of narrative importance, at least) which may reflect Pony's self awareness that battles between lesser social actors are more relevant to his future.

Secondly, and more importantly, there is the narrative function of the unstoppable, and literally 'mindless', opponent. It is important to the hero's self esteem that he is self-motivated and existentially responsible for his actions. Twice at least, Death's Head is caught up in similar duels with either mechanical or animal opposites: Plaguedog and Iron Man. In both cases Death's Head wins out due to the application of human cunning, often ironically expressed (it is referred to at one stage as 'behaviour that gets us mechanoids a bad name'). Clearly there is more drama and fear implied by the unstoppable and impersonal destructive force that makes it central to the masculine narrative. This also articulates a contradiction, that in Death's Head and Plaz are themselves partly de-humanised and machine-like, yet they possess enough significant human qualities to overcome such

weaknesses. In this sense, strength and vulnerability are almost confused: physical power is only really powerful when allied to human weakness. This may explain the structural significance of overcoming the indestructible, as in *The Terminator* films for example. Plaz is thus defeating the cyborg within as much as outside himself. The focus on subservient characters elevated to the position of opposites thus indicates an attempt to dramatise conflicting desires within the male identity .

Plaz/Pony

The final 'other' identity I want to discuss is that of the persona of Plaz himself. There are several points in the novel where Plaz reflects upon who he is in relation to his heroic role models. These moments offer an insight into the conflicts over modality status within the author, as well as a sense of what *Pony* takes from his heroes.

Before looking in detail at these, I want to sound a note of caution about privileging such reflexive moments. In *The Sleeze Brothers* there is a moment where one of the brothers turns to the other and says 'AHH stop Whinging Deadbeat...Something will turn up...In this typ'a story it always does!'. This is graphically represented in a later frame where the two brothers are shown appearing to dissolve. When one asks the other what's happening, he replies 'It's O.K. El Ape...we're just having a convenient story flashback'. These kinds of moments seem particularly meaningful to the more academic reader. Jim Collins (1989) has argued that such reflexivity is a feature of postmodern narratives in general and a salient characteristic of the angst ridden modern comic and graphic novel. It is certainly a stylistic trait in the comics Pony offered up as his source material; although whether he was just imitating the surface appearance of his sources in *Plaz Investigations* or whether such moments do offer evidence of a more weighty

postmodern aesthetic, rather depends on the critical investment one brings to the text. As such, this issue illustrates some of the potential conflict between the adult critic and the object of study.

I have already mentioned Plaz's first reflexive moment when he is criticised by Sam:

"Why are you always trying to be that stupide comic book charter Deaths head, Youll never be him you will always be Plaz Hunter no one els" (ll. 191-2)

It is significant that this threat to his self-image brings forth an explicit acknowledgement of the weakness of fantasy identity and an avowal of its strength:

"look maybe I'm not lik you, I need something to keep me going.o.k. I know I'll probobly never be Deaths head but if I die tomorrow then at least I'll die Knowing I tryed to be someone o.k." (ll. 193-6)

Later in the story Sam again accuses Plaz of behaving like a star struck child:

"look I know you like Deaths head alot but you will never be him, he's a comic book charter this the real world you can't take on both of them at the same time".

"I'm going to and if you want you can help" (315-8)

There is a level of irony and wit at play here which is difficult to take into account. I can't seriously believe that *Pony* thinks that Plaz is living in the real world, if only because Plaz is not a real person. Yet the novel persists in this fiction. It often refers to Plaz's reputation and character as if he were a real person and even more confusingly Plaz also refers to *Pony* as if *he* were real:

"Hi who are.. wait a minute Pony (Plaz's name which he used ~~fr~~ from the book the outsiders)

"Yep you remember"

"of course I remember my best friend, come in" Ray said dragging Plaz in.

"I've changed my name again its Plaz Hunter now" (ll. 317-21)

In theory, if *Pony* is real, Plaz is too, but despite the episode which follows with Kim and the more naturalistic setting of school in Tottenham (which I have suggested is modelled on a specific fantasy), it is difficult to take the story at face value. If anything, the more the novel appears to claim a 'realistic' modality status, the more it offers itself as something in between. According to the extracts above, Plaz is real because he was once *Pony* (whom we know is real because he is named as the author): yet Plaz's grip on reality is insecure because he is always trying to pretend he can measure up to comic book characters. On the one hand, we have an attempt to build a fictional and fantasy world; and on the other, the undermining of that fantasy even as *Pony* builds it.

I want to return to the question about who Plaz is, and what might it mean to ask and answer such questions. I suggest that Plaz is an amalgam of social and psychological characteristics that make up the persona of the male super hero: he makes choices, he is in control, he is in a position of power over women and yet he is also Plaz. This persona is the mode through which *Pony* reconciles the contradictions and tensions between his fantasy and his real life situation and experiences - that is, the relative powerlessness of *Pony's* material situation as an adolescent schoolboy set against the expectations of being a man. He is also a dramatisation of what (following Sarland 1991) one can call 'the reading self': that is, the part of *Pony* who responds (using the term in its widest sense) to an immersion in generic fiction. Plaz reveals the affective and emotional investment *Pony* has made in his reading and the ways in which his reading is a mixture of personal, biographical response, intertextual connectivity and an ideological structuring in masculine subject positions. On the one hand, he is a fantasy figure re-enacting *Pony's* readings of male genres; and on the other he

embodies the rationale for that fantasy by exposing the fraught ambiguities that led *Pony* towards fantasy in the first place.

Conclusions: from reading to writing , *Plaz* as transitional form

There are a number of features in this account of *Plaz* that might begin to offer a working model of the *media-writing* process. Carolyn Steedman's (1982) study of younger children's writing argues that 'in children's writing we need to look for what the writing does for the writer, not what the writer does to it, nor what it does for us' (p. 99). Following the work of Britton *et al.* (1975) she is critical of adults who take a patronising approach to work by young people on the basis of style and spelling at the expense of investigating other social functions to their work. Children's writing is about more than simply learning to write for its own sake: it is a 'means by which children actively reject[] or embrace [] the overtly expressed principles of their upbringing and in this way [come] to comprehend and absorb an adult world of meaning at their own level of understanding.' (p. 83). Like Steedman I have used *Pony's* writing as way of examining gender socialisation. However, I want to refine her formulation about the relationship of children's writing to its authors. I'm not quite sure if *Pony* is strictly a child in the way Steedman's writers are, but he is very much a child writer within the context of the school, in terms of his writing skills and in terms of his position as a relatively powerless boy.

Let me deal first with issues of spelling and grammar. Adult readers of *Plaz* have been entertained by its naiveté and 'directness'. It automatically puts us in a position of power and authority over the writer. This supports condemnations of its sexism and silliness. Thus, the opening page when *Plaz* rescues a 'brewnet' seems to stand for all that is laughable about boys. *Pony* is himself, as I've indicated, bilingual; and as such his

control of written English is in conventional terms weak. Although he obviously enjoys producing stories, he doesn't really like writing. It mirrors his social powerlessness: just as he is invited to take up a position of power as a man and have that power circumscribed, so schooled literacy is something he can't quite master. I'm still surprised that he actually spent all the effort on *Plaz*, given how unsatisfying it must have been for him. Not only is it not a film or a comic, but it can't reproduce the textual pleasures that are so meaningful for him. By comparison, as we will see in the following chapters, working in more 'visual' media can provide access to these pleasures.

Pony rationalised the effort spent on *Plaz* by suggesting that it was the plot for a film, and that this would sell and help him raise the money so that he could emigrate to America. I, on the other hand, have argued that it acts as a way of negotiating a gender identity. It offers considerable insights into the reading process and the meaning of a form of popular culture. In this sense I have been following Steedman in looking at what the writing does for the writer. Furthermore, my analysis allows outsiders to gain some sense of the detailed concentration which *Pony* must have paid to his original texts. From this point of view, *Plaz Investigations* also shows what *reading* does for the writer.

There is no doubt that however formulaic *Plaz* is, and however reliant on the conventions of popular genres, it is a highly individual piece of work. Yet it also seems to mean something very important for the author. This mix of personal significance and generic form is intriguing, and to an extent sets an agenda for the following chapters in this study. It suggests that for young authors the *resources* of popular culture can be used on a number of levels, in terms of genre, code and convention, but also in the wider terms of social knowledge including - particularly in this case study - that relating to gender. It suggests that young people have considerable knowledge of how these resources operate at both a technical level and also

at 'higher' levels of meaning. In Chapter Two I identified the need to bring together these levels in an overall theory if we are to make sense of students' media productions beyond the assessment requirements of the curriculum.

My analysis also suggests how individuals transform their reading is structurally mediated by a number of social dimensions, especially gender. The codes of masculinity permeate *Pony's* daily life as well as his imaginings. I have argued that these codes are effectively structured into a number of popular fictions in a consistent way which articulates their complex, and at times contradictory, nature. It almost suggests that for segments of the mass audience, in this case adolescent boys, genre fiction offers repeated tropes which speak to their concerns. However, while Fiske (1987) may argue this in relation to *The A Team*, it would remain difficult to prove in actuality without the sort of evidence provided by *Plaz*. Here, *Pony* can be seen re-working his reading of popular forms in a distinctive fashion and engaging with a wider set of values beyond the purely personal. Nevertheless the piece is, at the same time, highly individual, not just because it exposes personal worries and fantasies, or even because it uses the multiple personalities inhabiting its writer, but because it weaves together a particular 'reading history' (Moss 1993 p. 119-120) at a particular historical moment. As this implies, different readers come to texts with very different histories of engagement with particular form':

Any one reading is both specific to the particular location in which it takes place, the particular text involved, and [is] shaped by a much broader past. To concentrate on reading histories is to explore how a particular reading unfolds in time (p. 120).

My reading of *Plaz* can very much be seen as an excavation of a particular reading history which entails an attention to a whole web of influences that can go into any one history.

However, the main difference between reading and writing in these terms is that the writing forces the author to deal with the un-pleasures, as it were, of his reading. Like Moss's (1989) interpretation of another boy's writing, I've argued that *Plaz* reveals the uncertainties and fears that it appears to redress: the act of writing is a kind of magic to 'deal with' the anxieties of gendering. After all, it must be assumed that there is a mass audience for the texts that *Pony* finds so important: there must be thousands of young boys with similar reading histories to this author. Yet why was *Pony* motivated to write *Plaz*? There must be a sense in which choosing to write this story implies a particular engagement with its concerns. In other words it seems to me that *Pony* must have found the process of writing a sufficiently meaningful way of dealing with his reading to make it all worthwhile. This would imply that the transformative process of writing offers, in this instance at least, opportunities for some kind of reflection. At this stage it is difficult to suggest that the reflection is other than subliminal: *Pony* does not offer a meta-critique of his reading. Nevertheless, in re-working his sources he is clearly working something out for himself. I will return to the ways in which this kind of writing might be seen as promoting reflection, particularly in the next two chapters.

Plaz is referential and intertextual and it draws on the cultural forms that have emotional significance for its author. He is wielding the forms, genres and conventions of a trans-media culture together in a *hybridised* fashion. In this respect the principles of (film) genre theory, noted earlier, that 'pure' genres never exist, that definitions of a given genre can only be inferred from examples - which by definition precede the description (Neale 1980) - are exemplified here. Rather than view *Plaz* as a bastardised story, as a corrupt version of a hypothetically pure example, it is more profitable to see it as a absolutely typical of the kind of fusion and cross-fertilisation that exists in students' *media-writing*. I will develop this argument further in the rest of this study.

On the basis of my reading of *Plaz*, it does seem reasonable to suggest that it is through reading that one derives knowledge of genres; but this kind of writing actively reworks that reading into new forms. We can also see here how gender and genre operate in conjunction. In this instance, gender significantly determines *access* to a reading history, which in turn determines the genres in which young people may choose to work. The role of gender in this case study is thus more than the 'context' in which this author worked; it is key to how young people are able to develop their writing. This is not to suggest that gender is always the privileged dimension of identity, however important it is here and however important it may be in determining individual reading histories. In the following chapters gender is important but will be set alongside other dimensions, especially ethnicity and generation (age). In this respect these dimensions all contribute to the complex weave of social determinants influencing students' work.

Finally we need to return to the question of audience. As Britton *et al.* (1975) showed, the implied reader for school stories is mainly the English teacher. As an extended piece of fiction, *Plaz* fits this criterion. By contrast, the readers for the genres *Pony* draws on are himself and his peers. There is a sense in which he is writing primarily for this latter audience as he re-fashions himself through his multiple identities. Yet his peers were not asked to read the piece whereas I, his teacher, was. Of course in theory, *Pony* argued that his audience should be studio magnates and film makers although it is hard to judge how far this too, was merely fantasy. Overall, this mixture of intentions, which does at times indicate a certain confusion, is also indicative of the *hybridised* form of the novel (Bakhtin 1981). I am suggesting that *Plaz* is a hybrid, not only in terms of its generic mutation, but also because its audience is unclear; or at least because the text is intended to meet a greater range of objectives than I might think is feasible. The work I discuss in the following chapters is also

multiply authored which increases the range of possible readers yet further. Here however, a multiple address may not only suggest that this author found it difficult to de-centre himself. It also indicates how the social process of cultural production in the school context inevitably produces hybrid texts: an hypothesis I shall investigate in more detail in the next chapter.

There is a sense of peer and teacher readers, self and hypothetical others, all bound up in this story. This reflects the perfectly reasonable set of social expectations into which, and for which, young people's cultural productions are produced and received. Yet, writing for oneself like *Pony*, is likely to be, on one level, slightly unsatisfying because there is no cultural economy for this kind of labour. If not a trip to America, what could *Pony* realistically hope to achieve? On the other hand, formal schooling may provide more incentives for pupils to complete work, because of its emphasis on rewarding outcomes. I have argued that *Plaz* is best interpreted as a rather abstract *cultural* activity, in which an individual negotiates a gendered identity for himself; yet ironically, it may find more material reward in the media curriculum. This is one of the issues addressed in the next chapter.

Introduction

This chapter is based on an extensive photography exercise carried out with year 10 students in the first year of their GCSE Media Studies course. It develops a number of concerns from the previous chapter. Whereas the previous study looked at the kind of 'social knowledge' produced in the relationship between students' reading and their transformation of it, this chapter will focus in more detail on how students utilise their knowledge of the technical codes associated with visual narratives. That is to say, I will consider students' use of the visual codes and conventions operating in photography as well as *and at the same time as* their construction of conventional narrative forms. This also develops an emergent key theme in this study, namely the ways in which working in media forms draws upon knowledge from other media texts and thus may play a role in developing meta-linguistic reflection.

This issue is also strongly related to the tendency in media work, noted in the study of *Plaz*, to hybridise generic forms. By asking the students to make photo-stories I deliberately invited them to work within a recognisable form; but I also expected that the social context of production would encourage the mutation I observed in *Plaz*. The aim here was to give me further evidence of how students might mobilise the linguistic resources of their reading as they re-work it for peer consumption.

As I noted in my study of *Plaz*, that story was rather ambiguously directed towards consumption by others. In this study I wanted to follow through the whole process of conception, production and reception of media work and thus tease out some of the inward concerns of *Plaz*. The work I describe here was intended for more public consumption, and this explicit

orientation towards the peer audience clearly impacted on the ways in which the students carried out their task. This awareness of audience was further determined by the fact that this work, like most professional media production, was multiply authored. *Plaz* is obviously the work of one person, but I wanted here to investigate how group authorship, modelled on the conference-drafting procedures in English (see Chapter Two), might affect how texts are constructed as well as how they address audiences. At the same time, multiple authorship raises the idea of a more explicit and *dialogic* composition process. I wanted to investigate how this might affect the argument, noted above, that working across media forms may in itself promote reflection.

Finally, examining production involving multiple authorship and an immediate audience also helps extend my interest in the relationship between the individual self and the social self, in that it raises questions about the ways in which individuals might be seen by others. Although I have suggested that *Plaz* weaves together an individual sense of self with a notion of a generic self - a masculine identity - the scope of that study necessarily limits the lessons it might have in this respect. On the other hand the more substantial range of work represented in this chapter, and the range of student interests described here may help us clarify the relationship between writing in media forms and the construction of social identities.

Photography

To a greater extent than the story writing discussed in the previous chapter, photography is a genuinely popular medium, in which ordinary people are not merely 'consumers' but also producers. Although much of the population will have been required to produce stories during their time of

compulsory education, few of us end up as authors (Kress 1992 p. 3). However, in the school in which I was working most of the students owned or had access to at least one camera, and all were likely to have had experience of taking their own photographs (see Buckingham & Sefton-Green 1994 Chapter Two). In this respect, most of the population could be considered producers of popular photography, and this fact has interesting parallels with some of the broader social functions ascribed to writing. There are of course, few *economic* parallels between the social functions of being a professional writer and a leisure photographer. However, the *cultural* significance of popular photography, especially in the construction of histories and identities - through the medium of the 'family album', for example - has been well documented (see for example Bezencenet and Corrigan (1986), Sontag (1979), Spence and Holland (1991), Kenyon (1992)). Photography seems to be an ever-present medium documenting and recording life histories in a way that writing diaries or letters no longer is for most people.

While it acknowledges this popular usage, photography in education has often had an ambiguous relationship with it. The most relevant work here is that of feminist practitioners like Jo Spence (1986) and of the Cockpit in London, which developed an influential approach to using photography with working-class youth (Dewdney and Lister 1988). Early work in this field tended to regard photography somewhat uncritically, almost as a way of enabling the oppressed to represent themselves, and thereby achieve status and a mysterious form of 'deep' knowledge. However, as we saw in Chapter One, Dewdney and Lister's (1988) reflective account of the Cockpit work begins to problematise these arguments about the radical potential of the medium: in particular, it questions the extent to which allowing young people to celebrate and articulate their sub-cultural identities can in fact be seen as 'empowering' (see also Cohen 1990). Despite its limitations, this approach represented a powerful alternative to the

highly theoretical, 'deconstructionist' approach to Media Studies which was prevalent at the time, not least in its attempt to connect with the material experiences and 'structures of feeling' of working-class youth.

Whatever the difficulties of bringing a popular cultural practice into school there are also a number of superficial resemblances between the processes by which students produce photographs and the claims made for forms of creative writing within English. Indeed, as my analysis of Lowndes's (1968) practice showed (Chapter One), this parallel has a tradition stretching back some thirty years.

First of all, we have the idea that photography *expresses* individual perspectives and concerns. This is strongly reminiscent of the argument about the expressive purposes of creative writing, developed for example by Graves (1983) - the idea that expressive writing connects with the 'inner self'. From this point of view the work here continues to develop my concern with the relationship between the personal and the generic, exemplified by *Plaz*. This emphasis on the expressive within English teaching it has been heavily criticised in recent years (Cope and Kalantzis 1993), and is frequently parodied beyond recognition. In Chapter Two I discussed these critiques (e.g. Moss 1989) broadly agreeing with the view that the concept of *self-expression* pays insufficient attention to the social construction of meaning. Thus, it has been suggested that writing activities which encourage students to 'express' themselves are merely inducting them into the notion that they possess an essential self. These poststructuralist critiques maintain that these kinds of writing activities (amongst others) actually form a *discourse* of identity and pro-actively *construct* the concept of identity, rather than merely 'revealing' it to the writer or an external audience. Yet this is not to suggest that the whole concept of expressiveness is redundant. For example, within the sibling field of Arts Education (Robinson 1982, Ross *et al* 1993), young people's expressiveness is highly prized and continues to be a meaningful term in curriculum debate. In

general it is inaccurate to characterise English as a subject which has either totally rejected or blindly accepted this single limited function. In this respect the poststructuralist critique of 'authentic voice' (Gilbert 1989) may have failed to connect with a wider public agenda about the *aesthetic* purposes of the curriculum. For example, whilst the work of Graves (1983) may be seen as naive in this respect, students themselves clearly do define the whole process of writing in terms of the 'expressive' - though perhaps not in the terms Graves might use. The ways in which students describe and use media work in this way is a theme I draw attention to here. At the same time, the fact that students are used to 'expressive activities' in the curriculum means that they might approach photography activities with expectations derived from their experiences elsewhere. The notion of expressiveness may then maintain a *discursive* value for students accustomed to its use within the educational system.

Secondly, and to some extent by contrast with this, there is the idea that more formal photographic work, for example in Art, entails the *strategic construction* of images. This has many parallels to the ways in which students are invited to consider the effect of voice and register on potential readers and audiences in English. In this sense, the medium of photography may be even more transparent - in the sense of requiring less adult mediation - than story-writing, in allowing students to develop their understanding of the relationships between technical codes and effect. Contrary to popular caricature, both Art and English then, can be seen to draw on notions of a *creative discipline*, encouraging a practical, technical approach - the idea of learning a craft (Andrews 1992). The idea of making or writing as a craft implies a number of things: the idea of being inducted into traditional, at times professionalised, practices; the idea of a right and wrong way to do things; and the idea of apprenticeship. Learning to write from this tradition may involve the teaching of tricks and devices, of accepted ways of doing things (Medway 1980), but above all it suggests that

attention to formal qualities will improve the effectiveness of the work. This then raises a number of questions about evaluative criteria, which the young apprentice is usually taught at the same time as s/he is inculcated into the craft.

Finally, in terms of the process of production, as I have already indicated in my consideration of multiple authorship, we should consider the talk that surrounds the practice of photography. As I found out, more by serendipity than through research design, it is similar to that which accompanies the drafting and redrafting of written texts. In one of the most influential texts on writing pedagogy produced for teachers, (Richmond *et al.* n.d.) the role of talk is emphasised repeatedly at all stages of the writing process: inception, composition and reception. Talk, it is suggested, facilitates the imagination, the organisation of the writer and his/her writing and enables critical reflection the products themselves (Richmond *et al.* n.d. p 16-28). These ideas drew together work from the conference drafting school with notions of apprenticeship. The intention was suggest to teachers that a noisy talkative classroom (when on task) might be a place which encouraged *good* writing practice in contradistinction to the model of writing - or artwork - which situated the making/writing process as a solitary, silent, isolated encounter between writer and text. As I indicated in Chapter Three, this was not an easy case study in which to collect talk-data. However, the case study certainly begins to suggest that media production is analogous to writing precisely because of the similarity of shared processes.

The photography assignment

Bearing in mind the difficulties of using photography in the curriculum, I (as the classroom teacher) set a practical activity that allowed students to

reflect on their home and personal use of photography as well as giving them an opportunity to create popular narratives. The students were given a choice of two activities, to be carried out in groups. The first involved the production of a photo-story, in a maximum of twenty four shots. The brief asked students to imagine that the story would be published in a teenage magazine, but one aimed at a slightly older audience than *Jackie* or *My Guy*. The story could be complete or be the first episode of a serial, and was not required to be a romance, or to have a happy ending. The second activity was an 'identity portrait', a photographic collage showing 'different aspects of yourself'. My rationale for phrasing the tasks in this way was twofold. I wanted the photo-story to avoid being seen as requiring students solely to *imitate* work in the genre, both because this might encourage parodies or because it might confine them to a slavish reproduction of content. The identity assignment obviously derives from the work of Jo Spence and the uses of photography in education it encouraged (see above). The brief asked students to consider the way in which individuals have a variety of identities or images in different contexts, and how these can be conveyed by using different clothing, poses and gestures. For a follow-up activity, the students were asked to collect some pictures of themselves, taken from their personal or family albums, and to reflect upon how they were defined and represented in them. Whichever main assignment they undertook, students were also required to write an evaluation of their work, as is required in the formal assessment of Media Studies work. I shall draw from this source as well as interviews and classroom observation.

It was significant that only five of the fifty or so students who completed this exercise chose to make the identity portraits. This was partly because the activity was more individualistic, whereas the photo-story immediately lent itself to co-operative group work. As has been noted elsewhere (Buckingham *et al* 1995), working together may be one of the main attractions of media education: it certainly sets the subject apart from

the highly individualistic notion of learning in many other subjects. However, as already indicated, collaborative production obviously has radical implications for the notion of writing - traditionally conceptualised as a solitary activity. In fact, the 'identity' students quickly decided to work together and developed a common format and language to structure the activity. These students were worried about the self-centred focus of the activity - as compared with the photo-story groups, who described the process as 'acting'. The photo-story is also a recognised cultural practice, whereas the idea of 'representing identity', at least as it was presented to the students, seemed to have a less obvious connection to their previous experience of photography; although an exception here would be the use of photos on the bedroom wall or 'fashion book' put together by aspirant models.

When the class began designing their photo-stories, it quickly became clear that the concept of the photo-story itself depended on the *reading histories* of different students. The girls who had read photo-stories in teenage magazines (usually, it should be pointed out, when a couple of years younger) were much more sensitive to the conventions of the genre. On the other hand, many of the boys seemed to view the exercise as a form of comic-making, and the graphic style of several of their productions reflects this¹.

Ultimately, however, I will argue that most students chose the photo-story not because it was more familiar or pertinent, but because it offered opportunities for indulging in other narratives - especially possibilities for play and ironic comment on the students' own personal stories and place within school. It was this mix of the personal and the generic that was most intriguing, and it returns us to the interrelationships between the personal

¹ Kenyon (1992) describes how it is possible to buy stick-on speech bubbles and the other graphic conventions of comic narration in order to add to photographs. It is possible that the adoption of the comic form for this exercise derives from this practice.

and the social which characterised *Pony's* work discussed in the last chapter.

Popular narratives

The two mixed classes I was teaching ended up with nine photo-stories; four by groups of boys, four by girls and only one mixed group. (The 'identity' group was, interestingly enough, four girls and one boy). At first glance, the photo-stories appear to divide along gender lines into romances, school stories and thrillers. However, closer examination of the narratives reveals a complex web of parody and intertextual references. In the mode of *Plaz Investigations*, most of the stories mixed genres, to the extent that it becomes almost impossible to assign any one story to a single recognisable generic category. Thus, for example, *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* (see Appendix Two) is ostensibly a thriller, in which a mysterious mass murderer wipes out a group of friends when they stay late one night; but it is also set in school and involves brushes with teachers as well as a romantic sub-plot. Setting the story in school wasn't just a logical use of available resources: none of the stories by the other three boys' groups, *The Bank Robbery*, *The Squat* and *The Drug Dealers*, did this. In those three narratives there is an identifiable thriller plot acted out by the boys, although *The Squat* can't quite sustain the social realism and disintegrates into self-parody.

These different generic choices also had implications in terms of form. The boys clearly interpreted the task as making a 'still film' and sought to maximise the visual impact. As Costas wrote: 'We wanted to create scenes of poverty, violence and the effects of robbery....' - which reads more like a description of a film. The girls on the other hand, referred to the conventions of photo-stories as something they explicitly wanted to avoid

and show their superior knowledge of. This was a reflection of their desire to distance themselves from cultural forms that they associated with younger age groups. Manivone, for example, described her group's motives in a sophisticated and analytical fashion:

....it was quite difficult making up a story that didn't have any romance because most photostories have something to do with love....In our photostory we wanted to create the effect of peer group pressure and alcoholism, it took us forever to take one picture because we wanted to get the footing and body positions right and real looking facial expressions.

Several other girls also made explicit comparisons with the conventions of the photo-story, chiefly to assert their individuality by contrast, as in Zoe's disparaging comment '...It was different because they all had love stories ... and other things that people think of when they hear photo story.' On the other hand Emily uses the same term as Manivone and Costas to describe the credibility of her work:

We wanted the shots to look realistic and the murder scene dramatic....We tried different shapes for the pictures i.e. hearts, ovals, and a jagged edge for the murder shot. I was pleased with the finished product. Some shots looked very realistic, like professional ones....

'Realism' here, however, is not an aesthetic judgement but an index of professionalism. The work is 'real' if it is like real photo-stories, as opposed to Costas's and Manivone's 'real life'.

If the girls' superior knowledge of the generic conventions of photo-stories is shown in their reflective comments on the finished products, it is

also evident in the kinds of narratives they produced. *The Unbelievable Thief* (sic) and *The New Girl* are typical stories of how a new pupil is socially isolated and driven to deviance; in the first case, to thieving and in the second, to drink, drugs, possibly prostitution and death. Here the 'real life' school story is translated into their own environment. By contrast, in *So Sweet But So Sour* (See Appendix Two), the elements of the school story are combined with the teenage romance (a standard combination), but are given a macabre twist by a love-crazed or feminist murder.

Part of the problem with the photo-story format is that these girls see themselves as too old to take it seriously and are vigorously critical of cultural forms aimed at a less adult audience. Thus, they are keen both to show off their control of the form and to distance themselves from it. This results in one of the oddest photo-stories, *Jill & Meg's Excellent Adventure* (one page of this is reproduced in Appendix Two). Drawing its title and tone from the film *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (dir. Herek 1989), the girls' story is an improbable time travelling fantasy. In a way, it is closest to the boys' thriller-type filmic productions *The Bank Robbery*, *The Squat* or *The Drug Dealers*. However, it is perhaps the most reliant on dialogue of all the productions and seems to owe most to the idea of the creative story derived from English. Indeed, its sense of character, thought and motivation, and its static, rather illustrative pictures, seem to derive more from an imaginary pre-extant written story, although there seemed to be no evidence for this. I will return below (in my discussion of *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* and *Jill & Meg's Excellent Adventure*) to students' work in media forms which are effectively translated or adapted from other, different forms - a discussion which develops my analysis of *Pony's* uses of comics, books and film.

The codes of narration

1. Controlling conventions

If the narrative structures of the photo-stories reveal an eclectic variety of popular sources, the range of codes and conventions employed by the students in order to tell the stories and construct the individual shots also show how they located the task within their readings of popular culture.

The most conventional production, in terms of closeness to the photo-story of teenage magazines, is *So Sweet But So Sour*. Classic narrative conventions are demonstrated in profusion: as Emily wrote, 'we tried different shapes for the pictures i.e. hearts, ovals, and a jagged edge for the murder shot.' At one stage the group realised that one of their pictures, featuring a conversation between two characters, had broken the convention whereby we read from left to right. (In their version the character on the right spoke first: see the second page of this work in Appendix Two.) This explicit understanding of what is effectively the 'grammar' of these kinds of narratives shows a deliberate control of the form which clearly derives from a personal reading history. Indeed, Emily brought in a photo-story magazine, *Sweet 16*, to demonstrate to the others in her group the variety of shapes and imaginative graphic techniques available. In one of their images little hearts floated above the heroine's head to denote 'being in love'; in another picture a jagged cut down the middle showed simultaneous narration, as both sides of this inter-cut image are being represented in simultaneous time. These are examples of a fine control over their material. Indeed this latter shot was not, as one might imagine, composed of two images sewn together but taken as a single shot (which was also an exceptionally economic use of the available film: see page one of this piece in Appendix Two).

It might appear from this that narration (on the level of the movement between images) was constructed after the pictures were taken. However, this group did actually produce a storyboard which looked like a magazine page in conception, and which differed only in slight detail from the finished product. Being able to plan the finished product in this way indicates that these students were able to exert a high level of control over the exercise. It also implies that each level of semiotic coding - composition, speech bubbles, graphic effects etc. - could be manipulated jointly and rigorously at the stage of purely intellectual imagining, that is even before there was anything concrete to look at. This indicated a shared fluency in the genre and an equally shared sense of voice and audience. The group could, in effect, pre-decide the effect of the product, before they knew what it was going to look like except at the level of description, by talking about it amongst themselves.

However, different groups approached the various stages of the exercise (planning the story, storyboarding, and final graphic presentation) in different ways. As I have just shown, the *So Sweet But So Sour* group attempted to plan the project in a holistic fashion, which was not the case with the other groups. Indeed, I was struck by the enthusiasm with which the boys' groups approached the task. They enjoyed making up criminal scenarios as a form of fantasy, in similar ways perhaps to the investment that *Pony* made from participating in his story. However, what some of these groups failed to do was to conceptualise their stories as *images*, or to think through to the final stage how these narratives would communicate on paper. They needed teacher direction and questioning at each stage of the process. Yet the way in which each group conceptualised the various stages of the production process also depended crucially on how they related the task to a real cultural practice.

This is even more obvious when we contrast the narrative depth of the single pictures from a number of stories. In *So Sweet But So Sour*, an

enormous amount of thought went into the narrative possibilities of each picture. Thus, for example, the bottom two shots on the first one of the sheets or 'pages' (see the enlargement in Appendix Two), deliberately used the compositional effect of contrasting fore-, middle- and background space, as well as leaving a separate space for speech bubbles. These shots are symmetrically balanced against the following images, showing an alternative point of view, in the 'shot/reverse shot' mode of classical Hollywood narration. By contrast in *The Squatters*, for example, each image is used as a kind of 'freeze frame' of the action. Thus, we see the characters running or engaged in single acts of narration, like being on the phone or shooting at each other. This is significant because of the different ways the groups conceptualised the activity and imagined the potential of the medium.

However, the difference between these two examples (which are also differentiated by sex) could also be described in terms of writing ability; although, as with print literacy, this cannot be entirely disassociated from knowledge derived from reading experiences. The *So Sweet* group could operate the narrative conventions of the genre; whereas the boys merely *enacted* a narrative for the benefit of the camera rather than constructing it in images. Both pieces tell stories, they are functional pieces of narrative, but the boys group seems to be almost working against conventional generic expectations (romance, domestic settings etc.), if one assumes they are cognisant of the genre's formal features in the ways the girls are. Thus both groups of students can produce something from the activity, but only the girls can imitate the forms and conventions of the published genre; the boys make sufficiently elastic use of the medium to appear to create something else.

In the next chapter I will look in more detail at how students talk and write about media production. However, further supporting evidence to suggest a reflexive and intellectual control of their material is also manifest

in the writing produced by the *So Sweet But So Sour* group. Cheryl, another member of the group, wrote of the final product:

We wanted to create an effect that you could read the expression on the people's faces. The other effect we wanted to create was a close up of someone and see someone not focused in the background... I have also learnt how spaces and expressions mean sometime in photographs.

The last comment, in particular, is a remarkably concise reflection on the relationship between form and meaning. Clearly, the invitation to work in a form that was so familiar to the group resulted in a very self-conscious command of formal conventions. In this respect, it is noticeable that the only other comments which begin to match this level of control are from the other 'classic' photo-story *The New Girl*, also produced by an all-girls group.

2. From movies to photo-stories

In many respects, *So Sweet But So Sour* is the most conventional of these productions - although this is not necessarily to imply that it is in any way better or demonstrates more learning than the others. It simply shows the accommodation and use of standard narrative conventions. There are of course, no assessment criteria for this kind of writing, in the sense that we might correct the spelling or syntactic structure of a written text. *So Sweet* merely looks more like published examples of the genre than other work produced by the class. What does happen, though, in the necessary absence of narrow constraints, is that the students start producing their own genres through a process of assimilation and mutation, in the way I observed in the previous chapter. What was also evident, but is difficult to reproduce

outside of the classroom, is that the process of working in groups and producing work for an audience of peers meant that these 'new' genres gained currency and meaning through the ways in which they were received and interpreted in class.

Inevitably, some of these crossovers also failed. I have already described how students incorporated filmic elements into their narratives - although ironically, the photo-story that most explicitly derives from a film, *Jill & Meg's Excellent Adventure*, does this least successfully. I will return to this photo-story later when examining the role of fantasy in these productions, but for the moment I want to pay attention to one frame of this production (see Appendix Two). It apparently shows 'Jill and Meg travelling back in time', in that it shows the two girls squashed and slumped together - very much in the mode of friends taking images of themselves in photo booths. This image is surrounded by some silver foil lightening flashes. It patently does not really connote, let alone denote, time travel, but what is interesting is why its authors think it might. Georgina wrote:

When we had finished the story it looked like a real story, really professional, except that it is very big and colourful, a bit like a child's book.

Indeed, the layout could be described as 'childish' and the colourful squiggles around the images remind one of younger pupils' work. However, as in the large chunks of written text the story employs, the attempt to *translate* film into photo-story clearly becomes untenable. Georgina's comments above reveal this split between loyalty to the group and honest evaluation. The example points to a shared feature in all of the case studies undertaken at this school site; namely the tendency to translate other narratives and media forms into the students' work. Likewise, *Plaz*

Investigations almost transliterates comics and films into written story form.

It is, however, one of the boys' products, *The Rude Boy Serial Killings*, which most successfully adapts and transforms filmic and comic conventions, not in this *translated* fashion, but in independent generic format. Like the producers of *So Sweet But So Sour*, this group imagined the final product right from the beginning. The students in this group approached the task first through writing a conventional story, then producing a detailed storyboard and then going on location. Even more than with *So Sweet But So Sour*, one can trace the finished product back to its initial conception. The use of graphic styles derived from Hip Hop graffiti, and to a lesser extent boys' comics, are clearly mutations of form - as, for example, in the 'oooo!' in the fourth picture on the first page (see Appendix Two), where a boy calls out of the frame and the word looms ever larger towards an imaginary reader. This visual representation of verbal intonation and the way it dramatically pours out of the frame, or the way the 'blood' from the word 'killings' in the title sits on one of the photographs do not only show artistic proficiency. They also exemplify the simultaneous use of complementary semiotic modes that I have been alluding to above.

The Rude Boy Serial Killing is heavily inflected by race, not just in its black cast but also in its extensive references to 'rude boy' dress and speech. It is also heavily influenced by contemporary films. The urban black culture of contemporaneous films, such as *Boyz 'n the Hood* (dir. Singleton 1991) or *New Jack City* (dir. Van Peebles 1992), pervades the mise en scene. Whereas *So Sweet But So Sour* uses a kind of narrative depth within each image to communicate relationships and interaction between the characters, *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* uses the conventions of film narrative. There are a number of shots at the end of the story where the meaning is created through manipulating the point of view of the camera or

where the use of light and shadow create suspense and special effects (see the enlargement in Appendix Two).

Yet if film is the dominant narrative mode, the accompanying text tends to undercut this with an ironic distancing tone. Thus, phrases like 'crazy kid, he is our last hope' or 'The killer refuses to make friends with Scott' are spoken as if from a voice-over, allowing the authors to parody both themselves and the hyper-realist conventions particular to these kinds of films which they appear to adopt. Indeed, there are at least three levels of narration within this text. There is the pictorial level, which uses point of view and classic realist (McCabe 1976) camera techniques. Secondly there is the dialogue of the characters; and this is often set against the pictorial mode - often leading to a kind of theatrical irony. Thirdly there is a kind of voice over or 'story telling', in continuous prose which undercuts both of the previous two levels. This triple narrative voice is remarkably similar to the way young children's books use a narrator to comment on the action, setting up a tension between verbal and visual forms of narration, (see Meek 1980). Many of the films and comics discussed in the previous chapter also utilise this ironic mode. However, because of the multiple authoring, the pluri-directed nature of the audience (close peers and more distant members of the class, self, and teacher), this tendency to operate across narrative voices may be an inevitable characteristic of much media work produced in schools.

3. Finding a Voice

As I have indicated, the students' different conceptions of the photostory genre gave them a starting point from which they could modify and develop their own narratives. The students who chose to make identity portraits had no such common ground and were therefore forced to construct an

appropriate narrative in which to communicate their sense of themselves. Nandai described the process the group went through to select images to photograph as follows:

....for example if we thought our careers were important we talked about our dreams and what we want to be....we wanted to create an image of different angles of our lives.

It is not quite clear whether all the students ended up with similar 'angles' for logistical or strategic reasons. Either way, each of these productions is made up of posed shots of the individual as a pupil, going out, in the kitchen and at work, as well as less specific portraits. When evaluating the work, they all commented on the technical aspects of the project, for example 'I think I have learnt all about different ways of taking pictures such as lighting and shadows. Things like that.' However they didn't comment on whether the project 'taught' them about themselves and their image. There could of course be many explanations for this, although I would argue that the comparative distance between this activity and the students' prior experience of photography did not allow for the more explicit 'control' that is apparent in the work discussed above. This again reinforces the inter-dependent nature of reading and writing; the students' lack of 'reading' in this area appears to disadvantage them.

However much the finished products are scrutinised, it is difficult to find a coherent organising structure. Only Jeremy's poster actually uses the layout as a way of making connections between the images (see Appendix Two). This balances poses across the diagonals of the background (onto which the images were mounted) and has two pictures of him looking at himself in a mirror and a side view of his head (focusing on his hair cut) at the centre. In the other cases, the pictures seem stuck down with a rather superficial or unfocused design sense - which may be because the brief only

asked the students to collect 'different aspects' of themselves. This kind of design also suggests that making a coherent narrative, as opposed to 'collecting' different aspects, might require a different kind of task: although, the idea of using images of oneself to tell a story is not a familiar cultural form - as much as it might indicate there is no story to tell.

Significantly, the actual pictures themselves are all framed in a similar fashion. With the exception of Jeremy's head shot, the subjects are all in medium close-up. Generally, I have found that students at this age (or at least with this amount of photography experience) tend to avoid close-ups in self-portraits - despite the injunctions in the brief to 'get *close* enough so that you only get what you want in the picture'. While this might be put down to adolescent embarrassment or a gendered lack of self-confidence, it also reflects the fact that most domestic photographs frame the subject in this way².

The most significant characteristic of this group's work was in fact the pleasure they took in dressing up for the photographs. Indeed, the other students' interest in this group's project stemmed from their tendency to disappear into the stock cupboard for periods of time and reappear clothed in an un-school-like way. It would seem as if the *social process* of dressing up and posing was the most significant way the students had of exploring their identities within the school context, and that the act of transferring the pose to film was secondary to the real moment of exploration. This was reinforced by watching the students go about their work. Posing for the photos, 'cussing down' the comments of passers-by, and colonising the Headteacher's office for the 'at work' pictures were all significant acts of self-assertion. The actual photographs themselves seemed almost redundant.

This focus on the process of photography rather than the product has been commented on by previous studies (e.g. Sontag 1979). It does seem

² Of course, this would be difficult to prove, although it was certainly true of the pictures brought in by most of the students in these classes.

ironic however, that the project directed towards concentrating students on questions of subjectivity and identity only achieved this in an oblique way. Ultimately, this reinforces a central premise in the nature of media work by and for young people: as I suggested towards the end of Chapter Two, unless there is a dynamic cultural and social practice in which students can situate themselves, they are unlikely to 'express' themselves in the ways teachers of expressive subjects, might expect. As I suggested at the opening of this chapter, I had hoped that popular photography might provide this kind of context; and the question of finding appropriate contexts for students is a key theme in the following chapter.

This is not to denigrate the work of this group. In some ways, the pictures are a study of gender roles, even if the students were not explicit about this in their writing. This is particularly true of the shots of hassled domestic labour, and in the way in which Cherie and Rosslyn identify themselves as 'Ms.' when at work in the office - a title that is still comparatively rare in working-class communities, and signals a complex set of social aspirations. Tia's label for a similar picture reads 'Talking to boyfriend on the phone at work', which may indicate a fantasy re-formulation of conventional power relations. By contrast, Jeremy's vain posturing is classic image-conscious posing.

Yet the fact that these students decided to work as a group and devise, as it were, identity genres (or a series of appropriate codes and conventions) into which they could position themselves, provides an interesting indication of how we inscribe the self into forms of writing - and use writing to create forms of ourselves. The obvious contrast to this activity is autobiographical work in English. Literary, historical studies of autobiography (e.g. Abbs 1983) as well as poststructuralist critiques (e.g. Gilbert 1989) have shown how the notion of a 'history of the self' was constructed through a series of narrative conventions. As I indicated at the opening to this chapter, some critics have applied these historicist

approaches to autobiographical work produced within the school subject of English (Moss 1989). There are fairly standard assignments, especially at the lower age range in secondary school, represented by publications like the well-used *Myself* booklet (Hemming 1985), which draw from the idea of writing as un-mediated self-expression (see Graves 1983). However, such activities have been extensively critiqued because of the way they actively develop conventions to *construct* the self while suggesting that they merely *reveal* the writers' identity. Thus, when I asked the students, in this assignment, to represent facets of themselves, it was they who devised categories, like careers, at home etc. recalling the tropes of school-autobiography. I would cautiously suggest that the ways in which the students worked, how they interpreted the task, and how they framed their work, all indicate that they started from a notion of the self being a social construct - whereas there is a tendency in autobiographical writing to start from an authentic moment in the student's life. More direct comparative research would be needed to flesh out this idea.

'The 'me' in the picture is not me': self and play

In effect, I am hypothesising that the use of photography in this way seems to have highlighted the constructed nature of the self. For example, the comment above, made by Georgina about a picture of herself in an old holiday snap, might seem on the face of it absurd. Yet she is articulating a view we have all held at some time or another. Indeed, part of the pleasure of photography is the play it allows between fixity and flux, between recognising changing aspects of ourselves and the notion of an immutable identity. As we have already suggested, the actual process of taking these photographs in the intense, socially charged atmosphere of a school significantly inflected their meaning, both for the authors and for their

audience. In many ways, the social process of production allowed for fantasy and play with the social selves these students were interested in projecting.

This is exemplified in by far the most hilarious photostory, *The Chippendales* (see sample page reproduced in Appendix Two). This was a riotous production from start to finish. The story concerns a group of girls who are seen fantasising about a group of scantily-clad male dancers, the Chippendales. They proceed to encourage a group of boys in the school to undress and act out their fantasies - although they eventually reject them in favour of the fantasy.

The girls who produced this story set out to create as much subversion as possible. For example, when they were planning the exercise they wanted to set up an audition to evaluate the boys' physical defects, which immediately triggered off the anxieties of the group of boys who were working on *The Rude Boy Serial Killings*. This was humorously indicated in the following exchange:

Daniel: I'd like to be Incredible Hulk.

Andrea: No man, you should just be yourself.

The girls also wanted to bring in a doctor to do blood tests on prospective home-grown Chippendales and at one stage thought they would construct their narrative around teacher Chippendales. In the end, they used popular boys from the year above to pose for them. The logistics of filming this group created a maximum disturbance in the school: indeed I had to beg for some of these hunks to be released from their normal lessons. Somehow the act of photographing this photo-story involved large groups of students prominently enjoying themselves when they ought to have been somewhere else. As most of the actors and actresses involved were students with unruly reputations, the whole process of producing *The Chippendales* clearly subverted the 'official' pedagogic dimensions of the activity.

The most obvious point to consider here is the way the activity of production and the narrative itself place the girls in positions of power. Their desire is the motor of the story; and they also assert their independence by eventually crushing the vanity of the boys, who in the normal conditions of school are seen to 'rule the roost'. The boys' plaintive comment 'What's wrong, ain't we good enough for you?' has a particular resonance within the wider social relations of the school and these pupils' lives.

This point would also hold true for many of the other stories. The boy who plays the hero (or villain) of *So Sweet But So Sour* and who is killed because he two-times the heroine, is also being set up. The girls in this group specifically wanted to use a boy who 'fancied himself' and who had annoyed them (as opposed to other boys in the class who also fancied themselves but who weren't in the authors' social circle). The narrative allowed the girls to kill off this boy and contributed in no small way to the pleasure of this story and the response it received when shown to students beyond the Media Studies class.

Although the conditions of the photostory's production thus inflect the meaning of *The Chippendales*, it should also be read in terms of its generic conventions. Thus, the girls play with the language of fantasy which is part of the discourse surrounding the Chippendales and similar acts. There are 'naughty' puns - 'I wish I can workout with the Chippendales', 'I wish I could be in the Chippendales dressing room' and so on - all of which allow for the expression of the girls' hetero-sexuality and contain it within the comparatively 'respectable' activity of gawping at the Chippendales. Just as they laugh at the boys trying to pretend they are sex objects, so the girls mock their own ventures into this territory of fantasy and desire.

On the other hand this playfulness can also be read as operating in the other direction; that is, in terms of the way the girls themselves are

positioned within conventional notions of heterosexuality. For example, Deniz wrote:

We went through many different ideas and we ended up choosing the story about the 'Chippendales'. It sounded like a good idea because to meet the Chippendales is like every teenage girls fantasy....we wanted to make our story look real like the ones in the magazines.....I wanted to create a meaning to our story. Something that girls could read and look at and think 'I wish that could happen to me too, or say feel the same about it too'.

Deniz appears to take the fantasy at face value, rather than (as has been argued above) on the level of parody and irony. The very serious faces on the final sheet of the story and the curious photomontage of the male breast at its centre might lend credence to her point. It is possible to view this exercise less ironically - to argue that it may have facilitated a serious engagement with issues of sexuality. However I would argue that the whole process was much more ambiguous - even if that ambiguity could not be articulated by those involved.

Thus, the narrative structure of the whole story is notable for its use of symmetry and balance. The first and last sheets of the finished product use the same visual structure and the bottom two central pictures on the second sheet balance each other. It may well be that this use of duality in the narrative reflects the way that the exercise pulls the students in contradictory directions: towards the expression and containment of desire; towards an engagement with their peers and a move away from reality into the safer world of fantasy.

Furthermore, the fantasy itself also engages with the dimension of 'race'. The students who worked on this product had reputations as being unruly; and it is also evident that they are mainly black (certainly all the

substitute Chippendales are). There is a probable connection here between race and a reputation for unruliness, even if, as I was told, there are some black Chippendales. Yet I would argue that the use of black boys within the fantasy, is clearly suggestive of a wider social purpose for the activity.

Although the girls knew what they were doing in contrasting black boys with white Chippendales, they never made such a comparison explicit to me, so one has to question whether they made it explicit to themselves. On the other hand, there is certainly the possibility that the girls were using the project as a way of expressing their own desires for the exhibition of black flesh, which would represent a kind of transgression. For the black girls involved, this might serve as a criticism of dominant images of white sexuality, even if the best they can get is silly boys. However for the white girls, the project allows them an opportunity to express the socially forbidden desire for black boys - forbidden, that is, by their Turkish parents and to an extent by the inter-racial policing of mixed race relationships that went on in the school.

This reading takes us into a complex and contentious interpretation of the project. It raises questions about what kind of license the playful nature of the activity offers; and clearly the different participants, black and white girls, black boys and white teachers, all have a different investment in such a reading. However, the issue of racial identity also surfaced in *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* and Damien, one of the authors of this story, did write about the matter. In the original draft for the story, the murderer was to have been played by Mark, but the photographs of Mark committing the deeds didn't come out. The final version uses another boy, Steven, who was the only actor the group could come up with at short notice, once the group was allowed two more shots. Damien's account of the significance of this recasting is worth quoting at length:

In the original pictures the murderer has been a small white boy (excuse the expression) going around killing everyone, also, this person was not very popular in our school (this would have made the play more humorous to the reader to find out it was him). But as I said earlier the pictures of this murderer did not come out, so we had to use someone else. At the time we couldn't find anyone else to use, Sir said he would play the part, but nobody knew how to use his camera because it was different to the ones we were used to using. So Sir couldn't play the part. We looked around us and saw Steven Seymour (a popular strong black person) doing nothing. We asked him to be in the play and he agreed. Now (looking at the pictures) the play is not as funny as it should have been because Stephen is well known in the school (as mentioned earlier) and him being the murderer would not be quite as shocking to the reader as it would to the quite unpopular Mark (the original killer). Also Steven being the murderer sets up a typical stereotype of black people being killers, muggers, thieves etc.

This is an extremely interesting account on a number of levels. In fact, Damien needed a fair amount of persuasion to write down his thoughts and initially he was, understandably enough, reluctant even to name the 'colour' difference between the two boys. As has been noted, students often seem unwilling to identify racial difference, at least in the presence of white teachers: apart from anything else, they are accustomed to a school ethos which appears to value all as equals and yet seeks to deny difference (see Richards 1990). Damien doesn't want to allow himself to be open to the accusation of racism; yet the facts of racial difference are of course plain to see and crucial to progress through school. In conversation with Leon, his co-author on the project, he said that he didn't 'want people to think we're racist or something' and again tried to pre-empt the accusation that he was

just setting Mark up to fail: 'People will think we are racist getting a little white boy to do all the killing 'cos we're going to be strong'. In the extract quoted, he actually apologises for using the words 'small white' (which makes an interesting contrast with the way that white teachers might use the words 'large and black').

However, Damien's caution in his writing should not divert us from the more radical and political play with power that suffused the original intention of the project. Damien's account explicitly recognises how the meaning of the photostory will depend upon the meanings his potential audience is likely to bring to the text. He acknowledges that his readers will measure the fictitious drama of the 'play' against the school personae the actors 'naturally' possess. And these personae are themselves determined by the larger social categories of race, itself inflected by social acceptability, or (in Damien's terms) 'popularity'. The written account thus reflects upon the polysemic nature of the text, and shows that the control of multiple narrative voices and the play on differential audience readings is highly calculated.

If *The Chippendales* implicitly raises racial identity as a determinant of subjectivity, *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* (at least in the originally intended version) uses the category of 'race', as it is lived by Tottenham school children, as an explicit and socially manifest bearer of meaning and identity. In other words, Damien knows how to use 'race' as a signifying category within the kinds of meanings that are available to his readers, and he uses it ironically. Many teachers would be content with his final remarks about 'typical stereotype of black people being killers, muggers, thieves etc.' But Damien has clearly moved beyond the limitations of this debate about 'positive images' and into the realm of 'syncretic culture' (Gilroy 1987), in which he is able to deconstruct and to play with the categories of identity itself. This could be read as evidence of the postmodernist turn to reflexivity (Giddens 1990) in as much as social categories are constructed as

discourses, which have market, or in this case, comic, values. However, I would prefer to emphasise the nature of the social arena for which, and from which, such positioning occurs. Whilst this form of play may indicate a reflexive notion of identity, it does not do so at the expense of the actors involved. The play in both *Chippendales* and *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* is contained within the social world of the classroom and peer group. It is the almost explicit dialogue among the author group and between them and their audience that gives these products their wit. Silent dialogue between implied readers or suggested by solitary authors does not operate in this way.

'Every teenage girl's fantasy....'

The Rude Boy Serial Killings to some extent subverts the acceptable conventions of school activities and allows for a resistant appropriation of the task by the students, for example smuggling the weapons/props past a deputy head teacher into their Media Studies class. Yet the reflectiveness of Damien's writing and the co-operative way the group worked made such 'resistance' acceptable within the social conditions of the classroom. I want to return briefly to *Jill & Meg's Excellent Adventure* to explore a rather different kind of resistance, in this case through fantasy. As has been argued, the narrative of *The Chippendales* is also centrally concerned with fantasy, yet it situates this within a broader tension between wish-fulfilment and reality. The fantasy is a realist one, in the sense that it is set within the established surroundings of the school; and it is also socially shared, for example in the way it plays on the 'real' personal connotations of the individual actors.

By contrast, the fantasy of *Jill & Meg's Excellent Adventure* operates on a more implicit, almost unconscious level. Yet albeit in a different way, it

also signals a level of shared meaning and mutual understanding between its four authors, and reveals the different ways in which they read and appropriate cultural forms. In some ways, the story follows Valerie Walkerdine's (1984) description of the typical narrative structure of young girls' comics. She suggests that:

Girls' comics, because they engage with the production of girls' conscious and unconscious desires, prepare for and proffer a 'happy ever after' situation in which the finding of the prince...comes to seem like a solution of a set of overwhelming desires and problems.

(Walkerdine 1984 pp. 163)

Although *Jill & Meg* does not even remotely rely on a male hero to solve the problems of Meg's inheritance, it does use fantasy in the form of time travelling as a way of getting Meg's grandmother to change her will and thus cut out the evil Olivia Weston in favour of Meg. What is perhaps most striking about the piece is its cheerful heartlessness and self-interest. Nobody cares about granny at all and the dialogue and thought bubbles are full of comments like 'stupid bitch', 'old bag' and 'hurry up and change your mind'. The long piece of written text at the end of the story gives a good flavour of the tone and 'humour' of the piece:

Jill & Meg got their money and were very happy but were also sad at the loss of granny.

Olivia Weston went on to make more and more money, but soon enough she went bankrupt.

The years went by and Jill & Meg lost contact. Meg got married to a guy called Atay and had 3 kids, 2 boys, 1 girl. She named the girl after Jill. Meanwhile Jill travelled the world, she finally came back to London. At the age of 35 she met up with Meg on surprise, surprise with Cilla Black. From then on they kept in contact for as long as they can Remember.

THE END !

There is much here which should now be familiar: the use of a peer (Atay) to marry off Meg (humorously mocking the girl who played Meg, thus giving the story a particular resonance for the class); and the wry play with dominant culture in the form of Cilla Black's *Surprise, Surprise*. What is also striking is the way the whole piece subverts conventional expectations of gendered behaviour. It is pertinent to add that this group was comprised of high academic ability, well-motivated pupils, which makes their choice of genre all the more interesting. It would seem, following Walkerdine, that the students adopt a characteristically feminine format for their piece, in using fantasy as a form of resolution and attempting to construct an ideal future for the girls. However, this is undercut by the 'uncaring' ruthlessness of the characters (granny excepted, though she is patently shown as too stupid to tell good from bad), the parody of traditional endings, and the implied contempt for programmes like *Surprise, Surprise*, which are targeted at a female audience.

I am arguing that, like *The Rude Boy Serial Killings*, this story effectively engages with a larger ideological formation - what it is to be a teenage girl - than is implied by the constraints of a classroom based task - although, like *The Chippendales*, it sits uneasily between fantasy and common sense. The authors clearly share a level of unconscious understanding: their pleasure in fantasy stems from the desires which Walkerdine sees as central to the production of gendered subjectivity. Yet in contrast to the emphasis on selflessness Walkerdine detects in girls' comics, the authors of *Jill & Meg* use the fantasy as a way of allowing themselves to act selfishly and get what they want. In this sense, *Jill & Meg* might be seen as a critique of such notions of gendered subjectivity. Furthermore, these students are able to distance themselves from the fantasy sufficiently to satirise their own personae as 'good girls'. Here again, the *social* nature

of the production has enabled the girls to perform a kind of critique of their reading. Although *Jill & Meg* is not as witty as *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* and certainly was not received with the same sardonic humour, it also changes the power relations between reader and writer and allows broader ideological concerns to be articulated and explored in the classroom.

Conclusion

This discussion of students' work has sought to demonstrate how the creative use of photography allowed them to insert images of themselves into popular narratives. In the process, they were able to manipulate the meanings, both of the 'self' and of the narratives in which the self is located. In particular, the collaborative nature of the exercise highlighted the *social* production of identity and revealed the differing ways in which cultural forms can articulate - and perhaps 'express' - aspects of ourselves. As I have indicated this is one of the claims made for creative writing in the secondary school; although my analysis has also sought to extend this notion of 'self expression'. Rather than thinking of the concept in terms of the revelation of an immanent self, I suggest it may be more useful to consider how students perform a kind of identity-work in these activities. From this perspective, it is helpful to think of expressive writing as a *social* rather than an *individualistic* activity. Not only are selves made, changed and experimented with, but they are produced for and circulated in particular contexts. In other words, rather than seeking to throw out the concept of self-expression altogether (as some deconstructionists have done), I would advocate a theory of writing which draws attention to how notions of the self are ideologically constructed and operate within the specific power relations of the writing context, both for the writer themselves and for their audience.

In these studies, issues of gender and 'race' and questions of social power seem intimately related to the process of media writing. The generic forms the students showed knowledge of, and interest in, seem to have encouraged this very explicit level of cultural negotiation. However, it is not clear whether this feature is peculiar to my study or is in any way special to *media writing*. This chapter continues my interest, developed in the study of *Plaz*, in trying to determine why these *ideological* questions seem so central to the writing here - in ways that they have rarely been seen to be in traditional print-literacy practices.

I am, of course, using the term ideology here to describe an explicit focus on the relationship between meaning and social power (see Thompson 1990). In Chapter Two I described how the Cultural Studies discussions of youth cultures also drew on a similar approach, arguing that *signifying practices* in general are unavoidably ideological. Thus Hebdige's (1979) study of punk draws on a similar paradigm. From this perspective social relations are seen to determine meaning: the cultures of the young need to be seen in terms of a struggle for social power - and in the main, as forms of resistance to dominant ideological values.

However, on the basis of my discussion of students' work so far, I want to develop some theoretical implications implicit in my use of the concept. Although the work in these chapters does seem to engage with these broader social questions, it would be premature to conclude that all media work is *inherently* ideological in this sense. However, the 'open' nature of such work may suggest at the least a *tendency* to work in this way. This raises obvious pedagogical questions. What political functions, stances or positions are media teachers adopting in asking students to work in this way? In what ways and at what stages might teachers intervene to develop students' explicit knowledge of the ideological dimensions of this process? My hunch is that the discussions I had with both the *Rude Boy* and the *So Sweet* groups helped develop their grasp of these features in their

writing. The roles teachers might adopt in developing this *critical* awareness is something I investigate further in the next chapter. Here, it is enough to conclude that the conditions of the school and the circumstances of addressing a real *audience* (cf. Britton *et al* 1975) seem to have motivated the attention to questions of social power I have analysed.

These products also show the sophisticated control readers of popular genres can exert over the writing of such pieces. In the light of my interest in the interrelationship between *Pony's* reading and writing, my discussion here also raises questions about how writing appears to reflect back upon, and might potentially change, the process of reading. I shall develop this point further in the next chapter, but at this stage it seems fair to say that the students here use their knowledge of informally learnt genres in the school situation for their own purposes. The use of this knowledge seems, at times, to have encouraged a level of critical reflection, which, once developed, may then be used by the students as they read out of school: though how students are encouraged or choose to develop further this critical faculty was not really observable within the remit of this study.

In summary then, this case study developed two key themes in this thesis: the relationship between writing and social identity (or the ways in which media writing may develop a dialogue between the self and the social); and the role such work may play in the development of reflection. Beyond the discussion of my first case study, the use of multiple authorship, visual forms and the address to the peer audience have all continued to shed light on the relationship between informal consumption of the media (within domestic or leisure environments) and how the formal constraints of school-work may develop such understanding - *because students are required to use such knowledge in the making of new products*. Again this alerts us to the *dialogic* nature of reading and writing, but it also shows the potentially *educative* role media education may play in drawing the informal into the formal domain.

The work in this chapter has explored writing as both a mechanical and a social process. The control of 'film grammar', picture composition and mise-en-scene could all be compared with the control of narrative, character and dialogue that characterise story writing. Clearly, some of the photo-stories are more effective forms of communication than others in terms of these 'literate' competencies. At the same time, the meaning, purpose and communicative efficiency of the writing were partly determined by the social nature of the process of composition and reception. In this respect, 'writing photography' is highly reflexive and self aware. These students' conscious uses of generic formulae, conventions, and explicitly public or social forms of communication develop the *implicit* dialogues that we observed between *Pony* and his sources in the last chapter. These artefacts also need to be understood within the cultural economy of the classroom for which they were produced. That is to say they communicated pleasure and meaning and, on the whole, humour and wry comment for specific audiences. By contrast, *Pony's* work failed to find an audience beyond himself and a teacher.

It would also seem as if the work observed here is evidence of more highly developed and finished *hybrid* forms. If *Plaz* first alerted me to the ways in which students synthesise their reading and transform it in their media work, these photo-stories lend further evidence to this hypothesis: that hybridity may be the 'normal' mode of production here, that the range of demands and influences upon students enforces a syncretic approach to media writing.

Underlying all of this discussion has been a concern to tease out specifically how *media-writing* articulates a relationship between the subjective and the social. The medium of photography provides important opportunities for students to explore these issues in a concrete and accessible way. Yet its effectiveness in doing so seems to depend crucially on the collaborative, social nature of the activity, and on the students' ability to

use and to manipulate existing popular cultural forms. In this chapter these have ranged from films, comics and magazines through to the genres of the romance, the school story and the thriller. Photography can allow for a distinctive kind of dialogic play between the subjective and the social self (see Sontag 1979). It seems to have allowed these students a serious and meaningful way to represent themselves both to themselves and others. In doing so I have suggested that this exercise offered opportunities for identity-work; that is, constructing a subjective sense of self as part of the range of social personae involved in representing oneself to others. I am not suggesting that the self is a series of masks, to be adopted and changed, that the social selves enacted in these productions can be performed at will. These students' work show them working as subject and object, inside and outside, at the same time; and in this dual perspective working through important subjective concerns. I have argued that it is through working in this medium that such a relationship between the self and the social can take place, because it makes explicit and 'loud' the dialogue and the processes that are normally effaced in other forms of inner speech during conventional writing. There are clearly other forms of writing, particularly *critical*, discursive writing which depend on such explicitness; and it is to work of this kind that I now turn.

Introduction

In this chapter I want to extend my interest in the relationship between reading and writing by focusing on the notion of developing critical awareness and the role of media production as a form of critical writing. One constant theme in both of the previous case studies has been an attempt to define how the process of writing, and its relationship to students' reading, may or may not play a part in the development of critical understanding. By this, I mean that students' *media writing* may be seen to *develop* their understanding of the formal strategies of the texts they (re)-produce *and* the wider set of ideas communicated by those texts. However, calling this notion of 'developed reading' *critical* brings into play a repertoire of other discourses and I want to begin this chapter by unpicking some of these.

There is an established body of writing devoted to the study of teaching critical thinking (Grant 1988; Siegal 1988; McPeck 1990). I am still unclear how this field distinguishes between critical thinking and merely thinking: but critical thinking is, somewhat tautologically, presumed to possess an additional critical edge. The literature first of all attempts to define critical thinking, either in terms of a 'reasoning ability' or a 'critical tendency', and then to develop programmes of study which will teach students how to be critical. Much of the discussion revolves around the relationship of formal logic to critical thinking, the nature and place of rational thought processes, and the interrelationship between subject-specific knowledge and generic critical competencies. Here the capacity to generalise from discrete subject knowledge to other areas of the curriculum is important. In addition, the learning of *analytical* procedures in thought

and writing are seen to be central in any critical thinking programme. In particular, modes of argument are deemed to be important in the acquisition of critical thinking (Andrews 1989: 1995).

Siegal (1988) also pursues two further dilemmas. First, he asks whether in teaching critical thinking we are merely replicating traditional orthodoxies - that being critical is no less a form of indoctrination than this movement ascribes to conventional ('non-critical') schooling. Secondly, he tries to disentangle the relationship between critical thinking and theories of ideology. Siegal argues for the retention of a neutral concept of critical thinking in the face of left-liberationist educationalists (e.g. Freire 1978; Giroux 1981). Those authors maintain that there can be no liberal space for critical thinking, that education is irreducibly political, and that the critical thinking movement is ideologically contaminated by its dream of objective, dispassionate rationalistic argument. Indeed, for these authors, being critical could well be seen to involve what Siegal would call indoctrination: that is, adopting a more or less pre-given left critique of dominant ideological or social values.

This confusion over what being critical might actually consist of is further compounded by the term's specialist use in literary criticism and the role it has in the production of critical writing. Being critical in a *literary-critical* sense sometimes implies the ability to *criticise* texts, involving the use of specialist critical techniques, and the production of certain kinds of literary critiques, such as the critical essay (see my discussion of I.A. Richards in Chapter One above). As different schools of literary criticism are more or less explicit what these techniques consist of, this definition is problematic. For example, the New Critics, including I.A. Richards, were clear about a pseudo-scientific set of analytic procedures, whereas for F.R. Leavis the possession of critical insight was related to the acquisition of taste (Eagleton 1983). This attempt to define the 'critical' element of literary criticism might benefit from a rhetorical or generic approach: that is, being

able to describe what forms of discourse are seen to be an adequate display, or guarantee of, critical awareness. In addition, it almost goes without saying that being critical may be regarded as conservative or radical depending on the *critic's* perspective.

There are then three levels of definition emerging from this discussion. First there is the idea that being critical is a general attribute of mind, a set of mental skills (sometimes dependent on subject-specific knowledge) which are transferable and which develop with the maturing student. Secondly, there is the notion that being critical means the ability to operate in socially defined *critical genres* and with the appropriate language; in other words, to employ critical discourse. And finally, there is the sense of *political* critique, of developing a coherent position from which the student learns to act as well as make judgements. My use of the term *critical* throughout this chapter will draw on these three senses. However, whereas the critical thinking movement emphasises rationality and the development of analytical skills as *the* means to become critical, I want to explore some of the affective and emotive dimensions of being critical in order not to delimit some of its aspirations. The critical thinking movement also stresses the progressive benefits of *teaching* critical thinking, that actively bringing young people to certain stages is the only way to prepare them to develop themselves further. The research in this chapter seeks to investigate this notion; that *media writing* - in the context of the curriculum I offered - may impact back upon, and/or develop students' critical *reading* of popular culture more broadly.

I approach this challenge from a number of different directions. First of all, I consider the linguistic dimension and its part in the acquisition of critical discourses. As I suggested at the end of Chapter Two, there is much to suggest that media production may work in ways that are analogous to operating in a second language. Here, the experience of media production directed some students towards a meta-linguistic level. The question here

then is whether thinking at a meta-linguistic level operates *generically* - like the critical thinking school implies it might - and thus transfers across to other contexts. For example, in the last chapter I read Emily's comments to suggest that the experience of making media may encourage students to formulate more general, explicit statements about visual grammar. Indeed, throughout my discussions of *Plaz* as well as the photo-stories, I have tried to identify moments when it seems as if the activity of media production has facilitated some kind of more distanced reflection about the processes of making meaning. But is being *reflective* about the process the same as becoming *critical* in this context?

This difference only becomes really acute when it is positioned in crude left definitions of 'critical consciousness' (for example, Giroux 1981). From a vulgar Marxist point of view, as explained by Thompson (1990), notions of false consciousness, being duped by ideology, imply their opposite. The opposite of false consciousness must be something like 'true consciousness'; and therefore if people can analyse real social relations 'correctly' then they must be able to do this *explicitly*. In other words, there is a strand of populist left theory which simply equates the ability to analyse power relations with the possession of a certain kind of critical discourse - which is where the critical thinking school connects with theories of ideology. On the other hand, there are clearly ways in which I have interpreted some of the students' work in the preceding chapter as being critical of, say dominant representations of race or gender, without necessarily implying that such *self-consciousness* was required: or at least that the students should be able to provide evidence of it. I have argued for a reading of the student's critiques *in their fictions*, without necessarily requiring explicit statements in conventional critical discourses. In a sense, I have suggested that they are being critical in unconventional ways. I have also argued that students' reflection about their work and its process of construction may shift between explicit statement and implicit

understanding, although I have primarily *read* their implicit understanding in the products themselves. Here my working hypothesis has been that a meta-linguistic awareness can be produced during the production process - at least for some students. This may not have manifested itself in the traditional form critical understanding usually takes - that is, in the varying kinds of critical discourse, essays, political rhetoric etc.- but may be embedded in the media production work in other ways.

There are further paradoxes here. I have implicitly been using a neo-Vygotskian model of language use (Richmond 1990) which suggests that it is the translation between language modes which develops reflection. Richmond's model (1990 p. 44) suggests that it is reading and/or talking about writing, and writing and/or talking about reading, and indeed reading and writing about oral communication, that can develop our meta-linguistic understanding of each language mode. This model also seems to imply that such reflection can happen below the surface of consciousness: or at least that the translation may sow the seeds for explicit reflection at a later date. These notions can sit awkwardly with those advocated by the critical thinking school. As I suggested in Chapter Two, this relationship between explicit reflection and understanding underpins a central tenet in Vygotskian pedagogy: that in making the learning explicit the teacher can move the students beyond their present state of understanding. For it to be valid in such terms, *reflection* can not be, as Richmond may be implying, reduced to the level of process: it must take the form of conceptual discourse. And as I discussed in Chapter One, conceptual understanding does not exist in the abstract: it must take on a specific linguistic or para-linguistic *form* for it to exist and be observed.

Of course it may be that this confusion of terms merely serves to reinforce the dominant uses of media production within the more academic Media Studies syllabuses. As I have already indicated, the notion that media production can serve as means of developing a critical analysis of

dominant media forms, and hence of challenging the ideologies they are seen to convey, is relatively well established in the subject. Chapter One explored the history of this approach, in which media production was strictly subordinated to the central task of theoretical investigation. From this perspective, media production is thus valid to the extent that it develops critical reading in a narrow sense. I have already indicated ways in which students' *media-writing* may reflect back on their reading in critical ways; but it is of course difficult to know whether such productions indicate the beginning of a process - the development of *critical discourse* over the longer term - or merely the stage at which these productions have left the students. In other words I could not say that the photo-story work of say, *The Chippendales*, indicates a broader critique of gender relations for the students concerned; although it is fair to say that the work allowed them to take at least an implicitly critical stance within the context of that project. Equally, that example also suggests we should distinguish between reading and other social practices: the example is inconclusive in terms of how the project might influence either students' critical reading or the independence of their actual behaviour. In this respect, the critical thinking school suggests an inevitable linear progression - that developing critical faculties will have a developmental effect. Whilst I would take from this a positive notion of learning progression, the evidence of this research does not suggest inevitable teleological growth in this way.

At school level, and particularly in the context of GCSE and A-level Media courses, these dilemmas have been circumvented through an explicit appeal to an integration of 'theory' and 'practice' (Lusted 1991). The implication here is that practice is un-theoretical and conversely theory is not (in principle) at all practical. In this context the term implies the ability to reproduce pre-determined *theoretical* discourses, rather than the capacity to think theoretically - replicating the problem of defining what it is to be *critical*, discussed above.

Indeed, there has been a long tradition in Media Studies of requiring explicit critical discourse. For example, Masterman's (1980) early definition of the subject in schools described students' learning in this way - that giving them the language of deconstruction would enable them to criticise the media. It has been argued (Buckingham 1986) that this approach has tended to prioritise the acquisition of critical discourse as being an end in itself rather than necessarily developing critical understanding. Indeed, Buckingham's (1990) rationale for the research collected in *Watching Media Learning* was the need to investigate this problem empirically: might teaching young people a critical language actually make them *critical*? In his conclusion to that book Buckingham advocated a neo-Vygotskian synthesis as a way of resolving this problem. Vygotsky's model of how children developed *scientific* concepts - which includes social-scientific ideas - requires a recursive and dialectical process of teaching and learning, involving the direct teaching of academic language (for our purposes a critical discourse) at the same time as, and in conjunction with, developing the child's understanding. Buckingham (1993c) thus suggests that there are effectively limits to the ways in which mere acquisition of a discourse can make young people *critical*. Yet this is not to suggest that there is no place for the teaching of such a discourse: both because of the larger social advantages conferred on those who have access to such discourses; and because learning the critical language may play an important part in developing *critical understanding*.

Media Studies further plays out this larger theoretical problem quite specifically in the way it assesses media production. Most Media Studies syllabi at examination level require students to contextualise their media productions in a piece of conventional writing - reflecting upon the *processes* of production as well as the *product*. In other words a demonstration of *critical consciousness* - privileging writing as a demonstration of thought - is required to display critical understanding. This has led to a state of affairs,

where the accompanying piece of writing - often described as a log or diary - is as prized by the assessment process as is the media production itself. Not only might other kinds of learning become marginalised in these arrangements, but the students' own sense of what is important in media production may also be neglected. Grahame (1990:117) has described 'the inadequacy of written self-evaluation', concluding in desperation 'There has to be a better way'. She maintains that examiners require written work 'because we need evidence to justify practical work in traditional academic terms', that such writing is meaningful for teacher's definitions of critical understanding but that in requiring such narrow, highly academic work, many media students are effectively disenfranchised. The subject's restricted definition of critical understanding as critical discourse may miss other ways in which students develop their critical understanding. Her argument thus highlights how the critical dimension of media production has been recuperated by the subject's assessment process and is too narrowly defined in the specialist academic terms of critical discourse.

This argument is further inflected by the ways in which some media texts themselves are presumed to be more *critical* than others. Most syllabi stress the need to study both dominant cultural forms (e.g. Hollywood cinema) and 'oppositional' ones (e.g. Black British Film). One of the assumptions underpinning this requirement is that these oppositional texts are themselves inherently critical and that studying them will necessarily be a critical experience for the students. Setting aside the full implications of this argument for the time being, I want to note that in relation to media production the dominant/oppositional divide takes a further twist because it is another way of asking what the aims of media production should be: should the subject be 'training' students to reproduce dominant forms, or encouraging them to develop a critical understanding of those forms? Masterman (1980) articulates this concern when he describes students 'imitating' *Top of the Pops* and other TV shows assumed to carry dominant

ideological values. In other words, if we ask to students to work in dominant media forms are we implicitly denying them opportunities for critical investigation?

Inevitably, these issues have been framed rather differently by English teachers in relation to students' writing. While there remains a similar anxiety about the dangers of 'imitation', this is posed more in terms of an opposition between the personal and the generic. The 'personal growth' tradition in English (Dixon 1968; Graves 1983) is rooted in a notion of individual creativity; learning to master generic conventions or write in different styles is effectively subordinated to the expression of self (Medway 1980; Gilbert 1989). As we saw in the previous chapter, the collective nature of much media production almost inevitably calls into question these assumptions about individual creativity. Nevertheless, attention to questions of imitation in relation to creative writing, also need to be asked with respect to critical writing; and it is this latter area that the work discussed in this chapter also intends to address.

Of course, in English, this question is usually not considered as problematic. Many critics consider it quite proper to teach models of the critical essay and to encourage imitation of dominant forms in these genres in contrast to teaching students to write in fictional genres (see, for example, this difference of approaches in Broadbent 1995). However, even within discussion of teaching fictional writing, the question of imitation rarely carries such ideological connotations (see Moss 1989 for an exception).

In the following case study, I want to suggest that forms of parody used in 'creative' *media writing* by young people function in similar ways to some of the claims made for critical work within English. In this sense the tradition in media education which sets out to challenge dominant media forms, and in which more 'creative' approaches to media production are condemned, come back into focus. Far from being unthinking, I shall argue

that imitation and parody can allow a profound critical engagement with the reading and consumption of media texts. From this perspective I am suggesting that the purpose of media production, particularly at this higher academic level, is not so far removed from its traditional use in media syllabi, in that it aims to make students more critical. However, where the traditional syllabus stresses *critical consciousness* in the form of academic discourse as a preferred outcome I am suggesting that media production allows students a kind of *critical expressiveness* which can take a wider range of forms. It enables them to *be* critical in ways difficult to achieve in the conventional analytical modes of critical expression. Such work allows for affective or emotional means of expression as distinct from the statements of critical intent that hold sway in the critical essay and other forms of logocentric critique favoured by the critical thinking tradition.

I will explore some of these broader issues through a detailed analysis of two production projects. Because I wish to argue that 'critical writing' is not so distinct from 'creative' or 'expressive' work - in that both sets of terms can be seen as different generic expressions of similar understandings - this account is organised in terms of the fundamental oppositions that have underpinned my approach in the previous chapters: the personal and the social; the expressive and the imitative; and the creative and the theoretical. In exploring these distinctions in relation to these students' work, I also want to challenge some of the grounds on which they come to be made.

Positive images

The work I am going to discuss was produced in privileged circumstances, as part of the 'Advanced Production Module' for Media Studies A-level. Indeed, unlike the previous two chapters, this teaching may have exercised

more influence on the nature of the outcomes - at least for some of the work - than I have shown so far. Despite its essentially practical nature, the criteria for this module outlined in the syllabus appear to derive from a broadly 'theoreticist' approach: the project is seen as a kind of application of academic theory, and as such necessarily involves a disavowal of the personal. The syllabus required that the project be based on an explicit consideration of an aspect of Media Studies theory. Its implicit model would appear to be that of the political avant-garde - for example, the work of the British independent film and video movement of the 1970s and early 1980s - with its emphasis on self-reflexivity, formal experimentation and direct opposition to the pleasures of popular culture.

I chose to focus on the theme of representation and realism, and specifically on the debates around 'positive images', for several reasons beyond the constraints of the syllabus. The positive images debate is itself a major theme within popular discourse about the media (Daniels 1994); and it has particular resonance within public sector institutions, not least schools (Sefton-Green 1990). It derives essentially from feminist and black activist traditions, although it has recently extended to include issues such as ageism, sexual orientation and disability. The central thrust of this work has been to draw attention to the negative effects of stereotyping and misrepresentation (or indeed invisibility) in the mass media; and it seeks to reverse these effects through providing positive representations of marginalised social groups. The notion of 'positive images' was enthusiastically embraced by the Left in the late 1970s and 1980s as a means of effecting ideological change; and it became an object of ridicule in the right wing press of the Thatcher years.

As I indicated in Chapter Three, the school in which this research was set has a remarkably diverse population, at least in terms of the ethnic backgrounds of students. The community in Tottenham, as in other parts of inner city Britain, is politically sensitive and self-aware - not least because

of events in its recent history (see Gifford 1986). This context made it possible for the students to engage with ideological issues while simultaneously utilising personal experience and emotions. In different ways, all the work described in previous chapters has dealt with popular culture within a broad framework of cultural politics and power - be they the ethnic politics of *The Rude Boy Serial Killing* or the gender relations invoked in *The Chippendales* or *Plaz Investigations*. What this assignment aimed to do was encourage a more direct and explicit *political* engagement with such issues, while continuing to base the content within the students' own cultural experiences. From this point of view I hoped that this case study would clarify one of the salient questions in the preceding chapters: how media production might act as a vehicle for articulating the relationship between the students' sense of self and how that self may be expressed in the larger social formation.

This, at least, was the intention. The class spent two weeks discussing notions of realism and the 'positive images' debate, for example in relation to films like *Handsworth Songs* (dir. Black Audio Film Collective 1988) and the very different anti-realism of Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1991). The students also looked at the use of images in 'equal opportunities' campaigns - for example, the Haringey Council posters that adorned the walls of the school - as well as 'independent' photography, such as David Hevey's (1992) account of disability imagery and the work of black British photographers (Bailey and Hall 1992). The students were then set the practical assignment, for which they were required to produce a video or series of images that engaged with the representation of 'hidden' minorities or groups and simultaneously worked against the dominant conventions of realism. This was a demanding task, and the results were significantly varied.

One group produced a fifteen minute video entitled *Muggers Morality* that aimed, in their terms, 'to...challenge the dominant representation of

black youth and...examine the role the police play in the criminalisation of black youth'. This was an ambitious short film modelled on *Do the Right Thing*, following the descent into crime and eventually prison of a female rapper: while the first part of the film used familiar documentary conventions, the second part undermined these with a more direct, Brechtian address to the viewer. The second group produced a collection of posters aimed at raising the profile of the Chinese community in Britain, using a much more didactic 'positive images' approach; while the third produced a magazine called *Slutmopolitan* which aimed to be 'a direct parody of the monthly glossy publication *Cosmopolitan* (for sample posters and the full version of *Slutmopolitan* see Appendix Three) .

I will be looking in detail at these last two print-based productions in terms of the oppositions identified above. However, it is important to note some of the differences between this work and the productions described in previous chapters. Although some of that work was produced in Media Studies classrooms, it also used forms that young people might (and do) employ in their leisure time, as part of their everyday participation in popular culture. *Ponyboy* wrote *Plaz Investigations* by himself over a lonely holiday and the photo-stories considered in the last chapter built on the everyday practice of photography. By contrast, it should already be clear even from the brief description of the work in this unit that the students were being placed in a different position as cultural producers. Indeed, in many respects the students here were responding much more directly to the teaching than in the previous case studies. Nevertheless, I would argue that the formal requirements of this situation built upon students' existing forms of expression and cultural investments in a powerful way.

This is evident from a brief comparison with the photography of the younger students discussed in Chapter Five. Although I argued that the work considered there engaged with the power-relations of gender and race, it did so largely in an *implicit* way. The in-jokes of many of the photo-stories

emerged from the mix of genres and forms, and from a kind of play with identity, through dressing up and 'posing' - all within the shared context of the peer group and the school. The positive images work differs from this by virtue of its *explicit* grasp of larger social structures (even if the issues are effectively the same) and its self-conscious adoption of a 'position', expressed critically and directly as *ideology*.

The creative process and the place of theory

One of the most striking differences between the Chinese poster work and *Slutmo* was in terms of how the two groups approached their task. The Chinese poster group comprised four students with an equal gender split: two of the students were from Hong Kong Cantonese backgrounds, one from Greek Cypriot and one white working class. (Of the four young women who worked on *Slutmo*, three came from Turkish homes, while the other was white British.) The Chinese poster group spent the first five weeks of the project agonising over a choice of topic and engaging with a highly theoretical set of arguments about the representation of ethnic minorities. They ended up with four finished posters, two aimed at art galleries, one modelled along local authority equal opportunities styles and the fourth a collage of Chinese faces with the question 'Are they the same?' in English and Cantonese. They produced many discarded draft versions and substantial written accounts of the project. These begin to explain the difficulties they had:

The group started to examine the way in which black people were represented by people which were not black, however we soon decided against this idea because none of us were black and we would be just a group of people investigating another group we knew a little about.

..we could not find any representations of Chinese people in Britain in the mainstream media. This meant that theories had to be borrowed from the discussion around the representation of black people because the same things are relevant.

In this extract, Stuart describes an apparently objective and de-personalised move from the study of black people (which was obviously a major theme in our class work) to, as it were, a gap in the market: the Chinese community. The application of academic theory (mainly derived from texts like *The Critical Decade* on black photography, Bailey & Hall 1992) in itself raised a whole host of abstract arguments. Antonia, for example, refers to:

[the] essay by Eddie Chambers [in *The Critical Decade*] in which he asks whether it is possible to subvert negative black imagery, such as the golliwog image, to progressive anti-racist work. This theory is one which we took into consideration for our product.

I found it extremely difficult to invent images that would represent the Chinese community since it is an invisible minority.

It is very hard to destroy stereotypes that have settled in our society, making people aware of how a minority group has been victimised through racial oppression takes many, many attempts.

These comments show a serious engagement with the political and academic arguments. However, it is notable how the students in this group were almost paralysed by the weight of this kind of abstraction, and initially found themselves unable to actually make anything (cf. Williamson

1981/2). The decision to focus on the Chinese community came about through a tortuous process of elimination, which saw the group moving from black to Greek minorities. However, as Stuart explained:

...one member of the group [Antonia] was Greek and I felt she was uncomfortable with the group studying the race of which she belonged ...she thought Greek people were represented realistically.

The eventual choice of topic was made possible by virtue of Mei King's personal investment in the subject:

As a member of the minority group we chose to study I found that I was insistent on providing the group with favourable views and arguments for the Chinese people.

Even so, once the theoretical terrain had been cleared, it was difficult to imagine what could be put in its place. It was easy criticising negative stereotyping:

The stereotypical representations of Chinese people are having slanted eyes, using chopsticks to eat, straw hats, buck teeth, Kung Fu, working in take-away's/restaurants and being short in height.

But it was less clear how to reverse the process.

This seems largely due to the lack of an existing (or at least a widely shared) cultural form in which their ideas could be embodied. Because these students were, in effect, inventing a form of expression to encapsulate their ideas, they didn't have the security and knowledge of familiar generic conventions, as was the case with the work considered previously. As I have implied in the previous two chapters, generic knowledge derived from

reading may be required before one can write. Despite their attempts to define an audience for their work in art galleries or local authority workplaces, making posters to express abstract ideas resulted in abstract products. Furthermore, like the political avant-garde of the 1970s and 1980s - for example, in the case of *Handsworth Songs* - the concern to engage with factual (mis)-representations led to a documentary style of presentation (see Pines 1992), and again this may have not have been a familiar genre for these students.

The *Slutmo* group, on the other hand, wanted to make a magazine as their starting point. Their 'way in' to the project was through a desire to work in a recognisable genre or cultural form - in contrast to the Chinese poster group, who effectively had to invent the form of the product to fit the theory. There is a theory behind *Slutmo*, but it emerged *during* the process of production and with considerable contradictions. The following piece of dialogue, which took place in the classroom one day, begins to articulate a resistance to academic theory on a number of levels:

JSG: So you're criticising the representation of femininity in women's magazines?

Clare: We just want to have a laugh.

The over-serious media teacher is clearly being satirised here, but a number of further implications seem to be present in this exchange. There is the problematic situation of the male teacher explaining feminism to the female student - motivated, perhaps, by a fear that her work might not be as 'politically correct' as he (and indeed the examiner) would like it to be. And there is the student resisting the theoretical (and ideological) appropriation of her work, through an emphasis on fun and 'having a laugh', thereby opposing the teacher's insistence on serious, academic discourse.

'Having a laugh', not taking things seriously, very effectively provides a kind of ambiguity, a space for play, in which meanings cannot be fixed once and for all. As I shall argue, the kind of parody produced by these girls can be read in a variety of ways, not just by external 'academic' readers, but also by the girls themselves: yet in a sense, this is precisely the point of it. The possibilities here are very different from a privileged 'critical' discourse: yet the extent to which 'having a laugh' may in fact enable students to engage with the issues raised by academic theory is one of the key questions of this chapter.

Either way, the *Slutmo* group began with an existing cultural form, in much the same way as the work we have already looked at. What is striking, however, is the convergence of academic theory with questions of identity and reading in an indissoluble whole:

The magazine would be a direct parody of the monthly glossy publication *Cosmopolitan*. In the real world we like to think these things [cooking, looks etc.] don't matter too much but these magazines are so powerful...that these faults are seen as things that desperately need to be changed... Even the most confident and feminist of us are entitled to worry that we are not as perfect as we would wish to be... It is the utter hypocrisy of such magazines that led us to produce an anti-realist magazine and play around with the conventions in order to expose their hidden values.

There is a striking contrast between this nexus of ideas and the starting points of the Chinese poster group. In a sense, it represents the difference between abstract theory and what might be called personally grounded theory. It is also clear that where the creative starting point is culturally pre-determined, where the shape of expression is partly given, the theoretical issues have very different points of entry and engagement.

From the personal to the social

As I have already implied, it was Mei King's personal investment in the Chinese poster project that galvanised the group to produce some work. While the group produced only four posters, there were many more unfinished ideas. By far the most powerful were the two posters produced by Mei King, in particular the East/West picture. This shows four seated pictures of Mei King descending down the centre of the picture looking in alternative directions at images of Eastern and Western culture (see Appendix Three). There is a parallel text in Cantonese and English. Unlike the poster masterminded by Antonia, which has a picture of a business person and a chef surrounded by printed words 'integration, opportunity' etc. - explicitly modelled on the equal opportunities campaign work of David Hevey (1992), in an effort to find a relevant genre - Mei King foregrounds herself in the narrative. She described the image as follows:

The main question to be asked here was whether having a choice between two cultures was really a struggle or an opportunity to be a part of both worlds - to pick and choose aspects from two different worlds to suit their personal tastes as individuals. This poster is systematically divided into two; the right hand side - signifying the 'East' - shows various Chinese features (culture/tradition, zodiac, art and entertainment); the left hand side - symbolising the 'West' - shows the Western versions of these same features. In the middle of these juxtaposing images sits a Chinese person facing alternate ways (left and right), reflecting a choice between two styles. This Chinese person sits in a relaxed manner and wears a genuine smile on her face to show she is happy to have these choices open to her.

There are two salient points in this account. The first is the atavistic reference to the notion of the first generation immigrant being 'between two cultures'; and the second is the fact that the 'Chinese person' is Mei King herself.

The notion of 'between two cultures' stems from a common sense understanding of the position of the immigrant, which was prevalent in the 'race relations' discourses of 1970s sociology. It stands in contrast to the 'syncretic' model of cultural identity, which emphasises the greater diversity of options available, and the active agency of ethnic groups themselves (Gilroy 1987; Gillespie 1995). However, the clarity of this explanation and indeed of the whole poster indicates a kind of intellectual control over the project which almost renders the product itself superfluous. The conscious, strategic manipulation of the signifiers of East and West makes the work an ideal exposition of media theory. In particular, the parity of explanation between the writing and the image points to the way in which the theory *preceded* the product, rather than emerging through reflection. It seems a purely didactic, intellectual statement. As such, it raises the question of what actually *making* the product achieved in terms of these students' learning. If Mei King understood all these issues at the beginning of the project how did the process of *making* the poster develop that understanding - as distinct even from the ways that *displaying* the work validated her position within the class?

In this respect, the way in which Mei King uses the third person to describe herself might seem significant. It is used almost to confer the *gravitas* of authority - as though, if the reader knew it was her in the picture, the work would only have artistic merit. In that sense, Mei King seeks to authenticate the work through reference to external conventions rather than personal verity. Yet her reflective writing (and that of Ka Wai, the other Chinese member of the group) claims authority for the work through precisely this kind of appeal to personal experience. Ka Wai wrote:

Being Chinese myself at first I really felt uncomfortable tackling this work...I could see certain advantages and connections I had. It was interesting to explore the different ways in representing my culture and at the end of the day I came up with the right minority group to represent. I also found that the fact I had a say in the representation of my own culture, the posters couldn't really be criticised as a misrepresentation of the Chinese.

Likewise, Mei King argued that 'If, however, we had decided to study the representations of another minority group I might not have been able to contribute as much'. The hesitations and uncertain claims for credibility also reflect the unease both students felt about perceiving themselves as the 'Other' of dominant discourse (Said 1978; Bhabha 1986).

This may be explained by the way in which the group initially searched for a topic of study. When it moved from black to Greek minorities, Antonia argued strongly against using her culture as the focus of the project. This may stem from a very reasonable anxiety about being the 'object of study'. Part of this resistance may have been simply 'personal' - not wanting to be the 'centre of attention' - which in the context of schooling again seems perfectly understandable. However, I also detected an unwillingness on Antonia's part to construct herself as 'other' and indeed to conceptualise Greek ethnicity as 'ethnic'. We have already seen how difficult it was for the Chinese poster group to make visible the invisible. The presentation of the self might bring benefits in terms of authentication and self-expression, but it also exposes individuals to potential criticism. Nevertheless, Mei King and Ka Wai moved from this kind of personal expression to a much more impersonal definition of their identities in broader cultural terms, which in many ways is a considerable act of bravery. It remained unclear whether Antonia was being (reasonably) self-

protective, or whether she genuinely couldn't conceptualise herself in terms of ethnicity.

This ability to conceptualise oneself as part of the larger social formation, (an issue explored in Chapter Five in relation to photography), is taken up from the opposite point of view, as it were, in Stuart's final comments on the project. He wrote:

I have learned a great deal of knowledge from this interesting project but some would view me as the British (white) colonialist who is racist etc. At times it was hard for me to fit into the group because I am not from a minority group but I wasn't rejected from the others and I worked with the group who treated everyone equally.

It is striking that Stuart was able to conceive of himself as the voice of the dominant discourse - which is also, in a sense, a way of seeing himself as 'other' - and yet find a way of deriving pleasure from the experience. It could be argued that Stuart is just being excessively polite, and that his use of terms like 'interesting' is merely an appropriate bourgeois form of deference to the inverted political order of media theory. Yet almost by definition, this is an issue on which we will never find certainty, despite continual attention by generations of media educators (Williamson 1981/2; Richards 1990). In reality, students will take up a number of different positions and express a range of opinions: how they work through the implications of each position in their own lives is ultimately beyond teacher control. Yet however 'sincere' he may be, the fact that Stuart could consciously reflect on his own position in this way seems to be a positive form of learning - and in this sense, it represents something that Antonia was unwilling or unable to take on.

The way in which Stuart rationally positions himself within the theoretical framework of this project (and it should be emphasised that he

does so without the spotlight really being on him) provides an interesting comparison with the extraordinary participation by the *Slutmo* group. This group had worked before on magazines and moved straight into the process of production without spending any time explicitly considering the theoretical ramifications of the project. It was precisely because of this kind of work that they had wanted to take Media Studies in the first place - even if a lack of interest in contemplating theory could be seen to reveal a lack of *savoir-faire* about how to succeed in examinations. This is not to suggest, however, that they had an un-theorised approach to the topic. As Clare's comments (quoted above) clearly indicate, women's magazines are already a site of interrogation and conflict about gender roles. The fact that there was a shared understanding in the group about the ideological terrain meant that they didn't need a laborious academic map to show the uninitiated around.

We can see quite how emotive and shared the understanding of the ideological conflicts was from Zerrin's account of the magazine. The account is worth quoting at length because it is an extraordinary piece of writing on any terms: the fact that it was produced within the academic confines of an exercise on positive images shows how difficult it is to simply divorce theoretical analysis from the 'personal' aspects of the work.

....the most original idea was to undermine the other women's magazines, we didn't want to aim for the 'working girl' image and definitely not for the 'housewife & Mummy' look so we decided on having the whole magazine based on the idea of being a slut, who's so outrageous you couldn't believe your eyes. This meant we'd be mocking the other magazines with a 'Tarty' theme with the magazine aimed at the women whose skirt is never short enough, who's worried about her nails breaking and whose dress sense could have been thrown off the back of a lorry instead of just dropped, her lipstick was the cheapest

thing going apart from herself that is, and most of all if she looked hot enough for the men?

For this to work as a group we had to think hard of examples of what is slutty/Tarty, it wasn't that hard since being girls, it was easy to think of things that we would never do or wear, we thought of things like ESSEX girls e.g. SHARON & TRACY¹ which was really stereotypical. Also images of white stilettos and black fishnet tights were head off the list also bright coloured clothes with childish play-like jewellery e.g. plastic earrings, yellow beads, plastic rings etc.

Its always been easy thinking of slutty things since there's so many things that are considered so called 'Slutty'. Its even worse to think of why these stereotypical views and ideas are slutty anyway...How does anyone know if the way I dress is slutty or not? I expect these views come from old values and expectations of women being 'virgin' who's clean, respectable (listens to parents) and generally does what is seen proper to do. Now young lady/woman in traditional views would be seen as a respectable lady who's willing to keep her legs firmly shut until she gets married to the man of her dreams!!!! Also she must love children, cleaning, sewing, cooking and brilliant lover to husband! She must not spend money like there's no tomorrow seeing as she has to make sure there's food to be eaten, also no unnecessary leaving of the house. Then the final thing is she should dress appropriately e.g.. long skirt, shirt, hair back, basically no make-up and no bright pink lipstick...

¹ 'Essex girls' were effectively invented by the popular press in 1992, as a local variant of the 'bimbo/slut' stereotype. 'Sharon and Tracy' may be a reference to the characters in the BBC series *Birds of a Feather*: while they come from Essex, they don't really fit the image Zerrin is describing. Alternatively, these names are often used disparagingly as identikit white working-class names: perhaps this is how Zerrin is using them here.

So its easy just think in the completely opposite of these views and you'll have everything to know about sluts/tarts and how to be a slut, that is. So a slut is a woman who can't control her urges, who pastes make up on, who flirts, who goes out, who drinks, smokes, buys outrageous clothes, with no dress sense, long nails, short skirts, big earrings, fishnet tights, and white stilettos...

The contradictions here are obvious enough. If one wants to, it is easy to relate the expectations of Zerrin's repressive Muslim home to the pent-up feelings of this outburst. The compulsive repetitions (there are even more in her original account), the lavish itemising of 'white stilettos' and the detailed descriptions of clashing colours are unsettling perhaps particularly for male readers. This may be part of the object of the exercise from Zerrin's point of view. In other words, the piece is as self-consciously resistant as it is expressive ; and the male reader to whom it is immediately addressed (i.e. the teacher) may be being deliberately implicated in its exploration of sexual identity (Payne 1980).

The project clearly allows Zerrin to negotiate her sexuality, and to make connections between media consumption and personal freedom. What is less clear is what she thinks *Slutmo* is aiming to do. Although she appears to acknowledge the parodic intentions of the magazine she find it difficult to argue through the power relations of being a 'slut':

We then moved onto the articles that we thought would suit the magazine e.g. the representation of women from this magazine had to be a sexy object, can't do a thing, useless, only good at one thing. Well things like 'How to cook peas in under 3 hours', 'How to replace a light bulb', 25 ways to keep your man' etc. The articles were exaggerated so much so as to look and sound really perfect.

The sheer pleasure Zerrin has derived from being allowed to explore 'sluttishness', and the power she seems to have acquired from simulating oral sex in an imitation 'Flake' advertisement (the final page of the finished product) is only implicitly measured here against the 'respectable' educational discourse. This leads to considerable intellectual confusion. It is not clear whether 'sluts' really do or do not exist, whether they are powerful or powerless, or whether the alternatives to being a slut are actually preferable. Neither is it clear whether the magazine is satirising 'sluts' themselves or the people who are critical of them, and who have constructed the stereotype in the first place. Unlike Madonna (perhaps the unspoken presence here), Zerrin can't explicitly acknowledge the 'slut' in herself and is therefore unable to explain how the magazine uses the slut figure in its satirical message - although, as with Madonna, it is the fundamental ambiguity of the process that is essential if it is to serve the functions that it does (Schulze *et al* 1993).

In general terms the experience of the project gives Zerrin an unrivalled opportunity to explore issues of gender and sexuality on both a personal and a wider social level. Yet it is difficult to ascertain the kind of 'media learning' that might be going on here. If Zerrin can't disentangle the levels of parody and power explicitly in her reflective writing, what can one claim for the educational value of the activity? Of course this question raises a secondary one: the educational value *for whom*? Zerrin, as a seventeen-year-old girl from a Turkish family, inevitably has a different agenda to explore from that of Media Studies teachers. The project gives Zerrin valuable opportunities to explore these issues - although its value for her, like that of *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* in the previous chapter, depends largely on its status as a piece of creative work rather than the attempt to generate a distanced, rational account in the accompanying writing.

This kind of conclusion might appear to veer towards a model of media education that emphasises the merits of academic discourse as the only 'proper' medium for understanding. Yet there are very real possibilities that can be offered by this kind of work. What Zerrin is attempting to do here is something rather more complex than simply 'finding a voice'. If anything, what she finds is a set of multiple, conflicting voices, in which the positions that are available to her are far from stable or fixed. The confusions of her written account reflect the difficulty, but also the honesty, of her attempt to conceptualise herself in broader social terms. The moves in her writing between the personal and the analytical do, like Mei King's account above, indicate an ability to view herself, especially facets of her gender and sexuality, as 'other'. Unlike Antonia's caution about conceptualising herself in terms of other people's ethnic categories, Zerrin leaps into the pleasures of positioning herself in other people's categories of gender. On one level, this difference might be seen to reflect broader social understandings of gender and race, and a sense in which the former may be less socially threatening than the latter. Yet working on the project has clearly allowed Zerrin a comparatively 'safe' space in which she can play with the range of gender positions that are available to her, and reflect upon their contradictory possibilities and consequences.

The meaning of parody

Slutmopolitan is complex and thorough piece of work. It comprises sixteen pages in full colour (see Appendix Three). There is a front cover in lurid colours purportedly representing a cleavage with dangling CND pendant. This is followed by an advert for 'Tina's Tights' and a back cover which takes the form of a full page advert for *Flake*. Inside, there are a number of problem pages, including 'Dear Doreen', who deals with 'the dreaded broken

nail'; 'Clare's Clever Cookery Page' describes how to cook frozen peas; and 'Deirdre's Do-it-Yourself' explains the complexities of changing a light bulb. In addition, there is a comics page entitled '25 ways to keep your man', letters, beauty and horoscope pages. All in all, *Slutmo* inspired an incredible amount of activity: its level of detail and production quality bear testimony to the enthusiasm and commitment shown by its authors. The girls used weekends when parents were at work to black out bedrooms for covert photographic sessions, and appeared to work full time for seven weeks on the magazine. There was a very strong sense of shared friendship during this period, although this was sometimes tinged with tension. This often stemmed from the relationship between the young women as authors and their roles as actors in the various adverts or photo-plays in the magazine.

Zerrin's account of the magazine's genesis (quoted above) is also remarkable for its sense of excitement and personal involvement in what is (if perhaps only superficially) an academic exercise. Her account makes it almost impossible to distinguish between her subjective investment in the project as a piece of self-expression and her objective interest in the project's avowed intent, which is to parody women's magazines.

However another perspective from which we might view the parodic intent of *Slutmo* (and it is one which unites both form and content) is Judith Butler's (1990) combination of postmodernist concepts of parody and feminist psychoanalytical theory. In *Gender Trouble* Butler argues that gender is in itself the 'foundational illusion of identity'. She builds on the concept of the masquerade in Lacan, Riviere and Irigaray to develop 'a critical reflection on gender ontology as parodic (de)construction'. Butler argues that gender should be seen not just as a form of behaviour or a personal attribute but in itself as a form of parody undermining essentialist views of identity or femininity. Using postmodernist theory, she maintains that parody is not an imitation of an original but an imitation of a copy

whose original can never be discovered. Thus, gender is a continual 'practice' parodying 'the very notion of an individual'; that is, it functions as a way of exposing identity as fabricated and possessing no 'depth or inner substance'.

In particular, it is her comments on how the body is used in constructing identity which are most relevant to an understanding of *Slutmo*. She writes:

Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. (Butler 1992 p.33)

Page after page of *Slutmo* repeats precisely this kind of stylised regulation as readers are shown eye make up, hair care, nails and laddered stockings, all formulaically laid out and ritualised. The women under attack in the magazine are thus undergoing the process of 'congealing' Butler describes; and the project of *Slutmo* parodies the surface structures of femininity to expose the constructed nature of gender itself. Thus, one of the ways in which Zerrin's long outburst above might be read is as an articulation of the constructed nature of gendered identity. Her repeated attention to the artificial and stylised nature of 'the slut' bears out Butler's argument - even if Zerrin's investment in such a position might be different from Butler's.

As this would imply, the project raises a number of questions about the role and meaning of parody within the educational process, as well as the forms of distancing and ambiguity it relies upon, on the part of both readers and writers (Rose 1993). The reception of *Slutmo*, and indeed of most of the projects described earlier, foregrounded this double level of meaning. When work was displayed in class it attracted a high level of interest from other students in the school: yet their comments often

articulated a critical double standard. Personal comments about the looks or actions of the participants pointed to a secondary level of meaning which is often inaccessible to teachers. Chapter Five has already commented on the ways in which peer group relationships provide their own frame of intertextual reference: from the students' point of view, this level of audience reception was equally as important as teacher responses to their work and indeed their own expectations about its meaning. In this sense, Zerrin's confusions in her written account may reflect a recognition that she will ultimately be unable to control the ways in which her peers might read her work.

Slutmo is, like the stories in *Viz* or even classic satire like *Gulliver's Travels*, a single extended joke. The fact that the authors and readers found so much pleasure in this extended, almost repetitive, structure is significant because it shows the purchase the project's thesis has with its audience. As I have already indicated, though, the butt of the joke shifts between magazine and putative reader. Thus, on the horoscope page, we have twelve identical star signs, because as Clare wrote:

For the horoscope section I studied several magazines including 'Just 17' and 'More!' I noticed that most of the horoscopes for each Zodiac sign basically boiled down to the same observation, so I exaggerated this observation so that all twelve Zodiac signs were exactly the same.

Here the parody is explicitly aimed at the magazines and the genre is wittily and succinctly 'exposed'. The detail of each month's predictions, however, creates ambiguity about the identity of the inscribed reader. It reads:

Love:

I foresee the man of your dreams entering your life around the 29th. of this month. Be subtle in your approach, he is easily scared. Keep yourself well dressed for an unexpected visitor around the 20th.

Wealth:

A visit to King's Cross, London will revive your empty purse, but be careful all at once or you will find yourself falling back on financial hardship once again.

Health:

It's about time you went on a diet. Some of you are looking so flabby and its nearly Christmas! Remember to work on your tan in time for the festive season. A good work out with the muscleman at the local gym would do you the world of good.

If the overall effect of this page, with its neatly laid-out identical predictions, is to satirise the practice of horoscope pages and thus by implication the gullibility of female readers, the addressee of the actual content is different. This putative reader is the 'slut' of Zerrin's outburst. She makes money at King's Cross (a well-known haunt of prostitutes), and needs a fake tan for the festive season, presumably for display at the office party. Yet this 'slut' figure is clearly an inscribed reader and not intended to be an actual reader. The actual reader would, in effect, be laughing at the inscribed reader - the 'slut' - and it is from this that the irony derives.

Nevertheless, this level of complexity almost seemed to confuse the authors of *Slutmo*. For example, in their analysis of the front cover, which shows the top half of a female torso, revealing bra straps and tattoo with a dangling CND pendant, two of the authors came up with radically different interpretations. Emma wrote that:

The...photographic text usually marketed an idealised image of a woman for potential readers to desire, identify with and expect to attain through consuming the image.

To contradict this we looked for an upper body shot, without showing the face of a person purposely dressed in clothes that look sexually expressive. We did this by showing our model wearing a top slipped 'off the shoulder' with her bra straps showing. This being overtly sexual... because we are showing a part of a woman's clothing...which is usually hidden....

The tattoo is again suggesting that the model is sexually overt and undermines the traditional view of a woman as the tattoo is often stereotypically shown as being something a man has. The point that a woman has got a tattoo is showing that she is not a stereotypical woman even though she is dressed and posing in a pejorative manner. Consequently the fact the tattoo is on the model's breast shows she is sexually drawing in the 'gawping' eyes of men to look at this open part of her body.

In accordance, ...the chain with the CND symbol can show that the woman on the cover is involved and highly intelligent enough to believe in a cause that is often classed as supported by men and strong-feminist women.

This description uses a broadly semiotic approach, and implicitly draws on various academic sources - an important point to which we will return. The cover, Emma argues, was clearly planned, right down to its use of colour, 'Once more we disputed the traditional view of the way the magazine should look by intentionally using colours that did not match, for example

red and luminous orange'. However, this kind of semiotic analysis was also used to support a radically different reading. Clare's account of the front cover argued:

...the purpose of [the CND pendant] was to give the impression that the 'tart' was wearing it for fashion purposes rather than endearment towards the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Both accounts show a detailed analytical capacity to deconstruct the front covers of women's magazines; but Emma and Clare's differing interpretations of the meaning of the CND pendant stem from the ambiguous way in which *Slutmo* offers a range of ironic reading positions.

Ultimately, the fact that they can make such a complicated product doesn't mean that they can understand it with the same degree of complexity - or at least (and this is a crucial distinction) *demonstrate to* external teacher-readers that they can understand it. This apparent contradiction calls into question what it might mean to 'understand' their reading and writing in this context. There is clearly a level of 'understanding' operating which allows them to make the cover in the first place, with all its attention to semiotic detail; but that level is not necessarily replicated in the language of critical reflection. Yet in a sense, this notion of understanding only becomes an issue if we take my reading of the magazine as in some way offering a higher level of truth, which students are slowly labouring to reach - or in other words, if their understanding is simply measured against that of adult teachers, and 'ours' is taken as the aim of the exercise. Given the students' subjective and ideological investment in this project is it in any way reasonable for (male) teachers to make one reading of the project its preferred meaning? And how then might the *learning* be located in this form of complex parody?

It is perhaps surprising, given the importance of parody in students' work, and the ongoing anxieties about the dangers of 'imitation', that this question has not been explored in any great detail. Moss's (1989) work, for example, offers a broadly positive account of the ways in which students can use popular genres in their writing, but largely avoids this issue. To an extent the problem is a methodological one. On the one hand, one could say that parody - and hence the learning that might be seen to derive from parody - is in the eye of the beholder (see Buckingham 1990 Chapter Two). Yet on the other hand, as Rose's (1993) historical account of uses of the term suggest, the issue is one of intent and explicitness. In what sense and on what level does the parody contain a critique of what it seeks to criticise? This then raises the question whether one can criticise through parody or whether it is an intermediate stage in the development of critical awareness. Can one mock something without understanding why? Or can one imitate without understanding? And from whose point of view can these questions be answered - the addressee of the imitation or the author?

For example, some of the most effective pages are the advice columns. 'Clare's Clever Cookery Class' describes how to cook frozen peas. The illustrated page opens with a direct address from clever Clare:

Hi! I've had plenty of letters from our Clare's Clever Cookery Class fans crying out for my help in cooking those troublesome frozen peas. So here's my very own recipe for all of you who have written to us. You need to put quite a bit of time aside to follow this recipe but we at 'Slutmopolitan' mag think you'll find it worthwhile and quite pleasing. (You're fired- Ed).

There then follow eight step-by-step instructions on how to open a packet of peas and boil them. The use of alliteration, innuendo, clichés ('those troublesome frozen peas') and condescending tone ('you need to put quite a

bit of time aside') all point immediately towards parody. In addition, there are the stylistic echoes of other magazines - '(You're fired- Ed)' - and the absurd illustrations of a scantily-dressed model attempting to open a packet of peas in a 'provocative' pose. Yet the page could be seen to mocking *both* the style of cookery pages and the putative readers, who couldn't do anything as basic as open a packet of peas.

There is a similar mode of parody in operation in the photo-story/problem page 'Dear Doreen', which deals with the trauma of the broken nail, or 'Deirdre's Do-it-yourself', which tells you how to change a light bulb. Again, innuendo is a vital part of the humour, as Deirdre advises readers to 'practise screwing and inserting techniques'. Somewhat more pointed, however, is the feature on '25 ways to keep your man'. This is a series of comic drawings and *bon mots* which mix the absurd - 'Cut off his legs' - with the smutty - 'Screw him to the back of the door (then do it literally!!!)'. The cruel and the comic climax with the twenty-fifth piece of advice: 'MARRY HIM'.

As these examples suggest, there is no consistent mode of parody in the magazine. It is less contentious to argue the satirical intent of the verbal humour because it seems more explicit. The visual dimension is equally important, but because the codes of visual parody remain unstated, they can often pass unnoticed. Thus, for example, the layout for a jumper pattern was elaborately contrived to look like the classic knitting feature. The satirical poses of the models are fairly obvious, although there may be a level of parody in the colour combinations (as noted by Zerrin above) that is much harder to spot.

The question of intent is clearly crucial to any reading of parody. Parody only becomes parodic, it is assumed, if it is conscious and deliberate: otherwise it is imitation and could be criticised for merely reproducing what it seeks to mock. But it is clearly difficult for outsiders to determine such parodic intent in the case of a cultural form, women's magazines, with

which they are bound to have a very different relationship compared with that of the authors. Of course, on one level, this difficulty can be magically resolved through reference to the students' written accounts. There, the discourse of rational explanation can reassure the teacher that the parody is deliberate and also that it stems from a coherent and intellectually respectable theory about the representation of women. The parody would thus be seen as a critical stratagem aimed at the heart of patriarchy.

The problem, however, is that the written accounts do not say this, or at least not as explicitly as one might have liked. Even if, like Mei King, they were to explain the critical theory and relate it with equal precision to the product itself, then the product would not be able to contain the depth and variety of meaning I have argued it does. In other words, parody can enable writers to explore contradictions and multiple readings precisely *because* it does not anchor its meaning; whereas traditional discursive writing has problems with more than one idea at a time. By definition it follows a linear exposition of debate. Critical writing might reassure teachers about the ideological positions students are taking; but that may not be the students' aim in this kind of media production - even if teachers think it ought to be.

The other point to make here is that being critical or theoretical is the very opposite of 'having a laugh'. Theories of teaching and learning, such as that of Vygotsky (1962) offer us little way of making sense of humour, which could be seen to be more central to learning than might be supposed, particularly when it concerns questions of cultural identity. The accounts of classroom transactions in Edwards and Mercer (1987), for example, which draw strongly on the work around language and communication developed in English education, make virtually no mention of non-rationalistic, affective moments in the classroom. Yet the 'laugh' had by all the *Slutmo* group is about more than just having a good time. As Bakhtin (1968) argued in his analysis of Rabelais, the carnival allows

structured subversion of the dominant order. If we search for evidence of learning only in the domain of rational discourse, this is bound to limit the kind of learning we can find. In that sense, parody (despite or perhaps because of its essential ambiguity) offers a qualitatively different kind of evidence of critical understanding. *Slutmo* might well be seen as a kind of carnival or 'heteroglossic' (multiple-voiced) text; and as such, it embodies its own form of critical thinking in all three senses of the concept outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Of course, it is true that Emma's writing does make explicit reference to semiotic theory, and uses a number of relevant academic texts in its analysis of *Slutmo* (in particular McCracken 1993). It seems to me that this does slightly more than just reassure uncertain examiners or readers of the magazine that it really is as *critical* in its own way as *Feminist Review*. Emma has learnt to make explicit reference to larger bodies of ideas and to use concepts such as ideology; and while one can overstate the claims for this, it does seem that it has made a difference to (my interpretation of) her critical understanding. In a sense, however, the crucial question is whether the reverse is true: does Zerrin, whose writing doesn't begin to approach Emma's objective and rationalistic critique, really 'understand' what she has been doing? And if her understanding is 'only' on the level of parody, rather than explicit critique, or 'merely' a matter of felt experience, does this necessarily make it any less *critical* than Emma's? The obvious answer is that it is different: but how we interpret that difference may say more about the ways in which particular kinds of knowledge and discourse are socially valued than it does about students' understandings and pleasures.

Conclusion

Although creative and critical writing are frequently opposed to each other, it would seem from this analysis of *Slutmo* that they may be more intimately connected than is commonly supposed. *Slutmo* crystallises a number of concerns in this enquiry. It raises the question of the relationship between explicit understanding, reflection and the intuitive or expressive. It also shows how the 'personal' may be explored through group production.

In the previous chapters I discussed the relationship between what I termed the social self and the personal self, arguing that, for these students, the experience of media production may help to locate a 'personal' sense of self within a wider framework of how social identities are constructed. Indeed, my analysis of *Plaz* and the photo-stories paid attention to the dimensions of gender and ethnicity as salient aspects of such a *social sense of self*. Here, my attention to gender (in *Slutmo*) and ethnicity (in the poster group) has sought to show how students may be moving towards a more explicit understanding of these ideological concepts and using media production as a means to explore how they themselves may be positioned within them. The extensive discussion of gender politics in *Slutmo* has extended my concern with the ways in which *media writing* engages with these political questions of representation.

I have suggested also that successful parodies are almost implicitly *pedagogic* and therefore could be more profitably used within this kind of work. Rose (1993) makes this clear when she argues that:

the parodist's embedding of the parodied work in the parody means that even readers not well acquainted with the work in question can come to know it in the parody work. (p. 39/40)

In order for students to be able to do this, they must read, transform, and re-write the original in ways that set out to *teach* the audience about it. In other words, Rose's account suggests to me in the context of this enquiry,

that writing parody must count as some kind of evidence of critical reflection, in some respects parallel to Richmond's (1990) neo-Vygotskian model of translation and reflection. There would seem to be something (necessarily?) critical and reflexive in parody, though as I have suggested this may not always be explicit or even apparent to the parodists themselves.

Another way of approaching this problem may lie in the ways in which postmodern theory has redefined parody in terms of *intertextuality* (Rose 1993) thus stressing its reflexive nature. Reader response and reception theory (Holub 1984) have shown how central the notion of intertextuality is to the reading process in general, while cultural critics like Collins (1989) have argued that there is a close bond between intertextual reference and postmodern parody. Instead of thinking of all references to other texts or genres as intentionally parodic, they can be understood in terms of an ironic, playful, self-referential aesthetic. Viewed from this point of view *Slutmo* might lose some of its critical edge - and could be seen instead as a merely clever, witty text. It plays with reader expectation, it acts as an opportunity for its authors to show off their knowledge and therefore the parody I have identified, becomes citation. This would make the student's work no less critical (in the literary critical sense), in that it would show an explicit grasp of textual features; but it might lose some of the personal critical thrust I have sought to demonstrate. Nevertheless, thinking of parody as being part of a continuum with notions of intertextuality might be helpful in setting up media production work in other contexts. Rather than expecting all students to make fully fledged parodies, or indeed requiring them to do so, media production briefs might start with an expectation of mobilising intertextual knowledge and ask students to use that knowledge as a basis for their work.

In addition, this shift in emphasis might help students make a different kind of investment in their work. Rose points out that 'parodies

may be *both* critical of *and* sympathetic to their 'targets' (1993: 47), despite the attempts of many critics to make parodies one or the other. *Slutmo* exemplifies both of these dimensions - it is both critical and supportive of the gender roles (and texts) it appears to make fun of. One further implication here, then, is that parody - especially when conceptualised as a form of intertextuality - allows students to be critical and seemingly 'un-critical' at the same time. This option has not been developed within the mainstream of the critical thinking school but its 'dual perspective' has been well explored by feminists seeking to reconcile feminist politics with the pleasures and fantasy afforded women in a patriarchal society: (see for example, both Lewallen and Moore 1988). It certainly shows up contradictions in the *political* sense of being critical - that of taking positions - identified in the introduction above.

Finally, I want to note that the products here are not hybridised as was the students' work discussed in previous chapters. There are three possible reasons for this; some of which require further investigation. First, I suggest that the hybridisation process, so apparent earlier, is primarily the result of the range of influences that are compressed into media production. For example, the photo-stories in Chapter Five ended up the way they did because of the seemingly irreconcilable requirements of the task in the contexts of that particular classroom made by those students with their individual reading histories. Similarly, translating *Plaz* into a school story affected its final shape.

Alternatively, it may be an age-related feature; that younger students either do not possess enough detailed generic knowledge or do not care enough about, re-producing published forms. They may be satisfied with creating an effect for their peers which does not match adult expectations as to what a final product should look like. I never really knew how good *Pony* thought his story was in the end: did he really think it was like a real film treatment? Would he know what one might look like, or

didn't he care? Or was he so satisfied with what the story did for him - as the author - that he was incapable of seeing how others might read his work? I obviously suspect that this last point of view is correct, and I got the impression that the photo-story authors, described in the last chapter, felt the same way - that the work was good enough for their audience - even though on another level, they knew this would only work for that audience alone; that it would not mean anything to an outside reader.

Thirdly, a parody could not afford to be un-recognisable in this context: if these students are expected to be critical in the syllabus sense, then they need to identify what they are criticising. Indeed, that is the task I set. However, as my discussion has also made clear, the ways in which *media-writing* is received and read are crucial to the case that can be made for it. Even more so than any of the work in the previous chapters, the role and conceptualisation of the audience is crucial to making the parody work.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that *critical consciousness* cannot be simply deduced from the outward form of critical discourse. I tried to distinguish between the discursive form of traditional critical genres and a notion of *critical understanding* at the same time as noting the extreme difficulty of trying to separate 'being critical' from questions about self-consciousness and explicitness. I have tried to make the case that working in parody can be explicitly, but must be always implicitly, reflective. Of course, I am not suggesting that parody is the sole means of generating critical thinking in media production - although it is the most common. I dare say that different kinds of projects, with different aims, might also develop critical awareness.

Nevertheless, the production here primarily suggests that being critical is a social practice which takes place within specific social contexts and relationships. For the authors of *Slutmo* the project offers a way of *expressing* critical judgements, of *enacting* a kind of criticism within the social context of the school. At times this mode of criticism is connected to

more traditional of forms of expression, as in Emma's writing, for example; while at other times, as in Zerrin's, it is not.

In this sense I would want to set a notion of *critical enactment* alongside the traditional claims made for media production. This project, like the photo-stories in the previous chapter, seems to have enabled these students to achieve a kind of critical (media) literacy beyond that attainable through conventional 'deconstructionist' practices. In particular this example draws attention to the way that being critical is not an abstract intellectual state of being, or a set of mental practices suggested by the critical thinking school, but profoundly located within, in this instance, the political concerns of gender and race, and the social context in which it is performed.

As I noted in Chapter Three, the field work undertaken in all the case studies so far was carried out at one school site and was completed by the end of 1992. Reviewing this work it became clear to me that I had concentrated in many respects on questions around genre, cultural form and the social relations constructed by the writers during the whole process of their *writing*. In the terms of my discussion in Chapter Two, it is probably fair to say that all three studies so far have explored media production from what I have termed, a 'top down' perspective; that is, they have explicitly concerned themselves with the broad ways in which meaning is constructed, particularly in terms of narrative and genre. To an extent the 'lower level' concerns with how meanings actually get made - at the micro- level of language - have not been directly addressed. Indeed, at the end of Chapter Two I identified a number of research questions, some of which have not been fully addressed by the case studies at my first school site. I want to begin this chapter then, by reviewing some of these questions as, to an extent, they framed the way I designed the research I recount in this final case study.

In addition, it is worthwhile reiterating, that devising research questions is a recursive process. The data - or at least interpreting the data - raises further issues and refines the original research questions. Working in a new school site at the beginning of 1994 gave me the opportunity not only to revisit questions I might have missed, but the chance to ask again questions that, only with the benefit of my initial research, I could now frame. Again I would emphasise that the whole of this thesis is constructed as a *mosaic*, addressing a set of overlapping questions from a number of perspectives. This can give rise to inconsistencies in that the case study approach will inevitably follow through a specific set of concerns, rather

than being able to answer all possible questions at once. As I argued in Chapter Three, however, it is also a method that can generate complex research questions and is particularly appropriate for the kind of theoretical focalisation I used here.

Learning to use a new medium

When discussing writing pedagogy in Chapter Two, I drew attention to a series of oppositions underlying the field. These can be summed up in binary pairs: genre vs. process; culture vs. technique; and imitation vs. expression. I have suggested that the political pressures to adopt either side of these dyads can actively hinder an understanding of *media writing*. For example, the balance between 'expression' and 'imitation' in theories of writing is harshly debated (Cope and Kalantzis 1993). Whereas writing has been seen by some critics as the means to express the 'self', others have argued that the self is purely a discursive construct (Gilbert 1989). On this basis, if we ask students to produce expressive writing, we are merely asking them to replicate the genres which enshrine concepts of an essential self (Moss 1989).

The discussion around photography in Chapter Five was partly concerned with this problem. I argued there that the assignment allowed students the opportunity to explore ways in which they - as individual and social beings - might be constructed. In so doing, I suggested that the students' work exceeded a crude or illusory opposition between 'expression' and 'imitation'. In attempting to develop this argument in this chapter, I want to look more closely at the precise effects of media technologies, both in the way they determine the production process and in ways that students may have to learn to become familiar with them. In other words learning to use the technology may have a very specific effect upon this tension

between 'expression' and 'imitation', because it throws into relief the question of how students might learn to work with technology - and by extension how they might be *taught* to use it.

In the previous case studies this problem has been raised on a much more *conceptual* level, looking at what students already know from informal consumption in terms of social and textual *understanding*, and how they may apply it during the production process. The kinds of *understanding* I have identified have been at the level of genre and narrative, in for example my study of *Plaz* or the photo-stories. In the context of my studies I have not really considered how the students *learnt to make* photo-stories, parody magazines etc. I have not focused on production *skills* from the point of view of the teacher, but more what the students, the learners, *already know* and how they use that knowledge in their media productions. This case study however, addresses these kinds of pedagogic questions more directly than in the previous chapters. Of course these two levels of knowledge and teaching are self - evidently related, but the kind of research I had carried out in the first school site rather ignored a concern with how students might *learn to write*.

The previous three case studies also described forms of production which, although new in comparison to writing (in the traditional sense) have actually utilised nineteenth century technologies - photography in particular - and I did not need to spend much time actually teaching the students how to use the equipment. However, in this case study I intend to explore making media using digital multimedia which for most of the students was definitely a new technology. This will further develop several key themes in this study. It will explore more prosaic forms of production than the elaborate parodies of Chapter Six, to see how more mundane forms of media production might work within the normal reading and writing of everyday classrooms. And secondly it will raise questions about the relationship between technology and artistic expression, questions which

have been re-vitalised by the explosion of interest in the democratic potential of new technologies in contemporary society; and which, as Dovey (1996) suggests, re-capitulate earlier aspirations around 'older' media like video.

Whereas these 'older' technologies such as film and video have gradually been granted due status as potentially creative tools, the computer has now become the contentious machine in this ongoing struggle for aesthetic recognition (Lanham 1993). In particular, the development of multimedia has made the computer potentially more of a creative tool. Until recently, certain kinds of media production were only available to professional media producers with access to expensive and complex technology: for example, complex use of animation or special effects and editing. Yet such capabilities are now increasingly accessible to users of personal computers, both in education and in the home (Turkle 1984; Greenfield 1984; Woolley 1992).

However the availability of cheap media production *equipment* does not in itself suggest how and for what purposes it may be used (Sefton-Green & Buckingham 1996). Obviously, the ability to undertake media production in the first place is largely determined by the cost and accessibility of equipment. For example, technological developments in video at the end of the 1970s brought 'film' making within the reach of most schools; and subsequent technological changes have played a major role in the growth of media education in general. However, whilst very few people today would dispute the 'artistic' dimensions of film and photography, there is also a widespread feeling that media technology is 'impersonal' and difficult to use. Focusing rings, switches and computer keyboards are not granted the prosthetic status accorded to the artists' sable brush or the writer's quill.

This chapter will consider production work using new multimedia technologies carried out in mainstream English lessons at an all-girls'

school. This work was slightly different from that described in the previous chapters and had three specific aims for the teachers in this second location. First, from a broadly vocational and skills-based perspective, long term trends in commercial media production indicate that digital multimedia processes are becoming the dominant production practice. Secondly, my experience of media production, such as that described in Chapters Five and Six suggested that there might be gaps within the production process that are impervious to teaching: how, for example, did the authors of *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* know how to construct narrative in a storyboard? I hypothesised that the digital technology itself might make explicit aspects of media production that are more 'hidden away' in conventional (analogue) technologies. For example, would introducing students to non-linear editing enable them to get closer to the actual decisions made in the editing process than using conventional editing equipment? Thirdly, the computer screen is increasingly replacing the television screen as the place where young people *consume* media products, from games to 'interactive' books and films (Haddon 1993). Multimedia formats are a developing medium in their own right. And just as practical work in photography or video seeks to build upon young people's experience as consumers of those media, the same will increasingly be the case with work in this area.

English, *media-writing* and new technologies

Activities such as designing book jackets and posters, or genre studies of horror or romance, have become fairly commonplace in most schools as a result of the broader approach to the study of books described in the Cox report (1989) and disseminated through the LINC project (see Carter 1990). Although they are not always identified as 'media education', it is important to recognise that such activities are as much examples of media production

as more complex video work. However, what is particularly interesting about these kinds of activities is the way their pedagogic focus is altered when they take place in English. Thus, producing book covers within English might be used as a way of focusing students on the content of the book under discussion - in effect, as another means of developing literary appreciation. By contrast, in Media Studies it would be used as part of a wider study of the processes of book production, and of the ways in which the publishing industry targets potential readers. In addition, media teachers might be more likely to require students to *reflect critically* on their media production in written form - as I discussed in the last two chapters. By contrast, in English, as in Art, being able to 'do' the task is often seen to be enough (Buckingham 1990b).

Yet apart from the technology itself, the kind of work described here would not be out of place in any English department around the country. Indeed, part of the aim of this piece of research was to ask students to carry out traditional work in a new way in order to identify the precise contributions making media with new technologies might make to what they learnt from the exercise.

This case study describes work carried out with three age groups : years seven, eight and ten. The youngest age group were asked to use a program called *Morph*. This transforms one image into another relatively smoothly, thus giving the impression that faces or objects can metamorphose in front of your eyes (*Edge* 1993). It was included as part of a standard year seven unit, the *Myself* project (Hemming 1985), a series of activities all revolving around aspects of the self. It is a popular topic, common in year seven, intended as a way of encouraging students to reflect on their growth as they start secondary school. As I mentioned in Chapter Five above, it has been suggested that this unit derives from the emphasis in 'growth English' on autobiography as a way of 'restructuring consciousness' (see Medway 1980). The *Morph* activity required students to

bring in images of themselves and members of their family. In pairs, they were taught how to use the program and subsequently asked to write up a description of their facial features (though I never saw the data from this). The activity allowed the morphing could be used in two ways: either getting the students to transform themselves into a fantasy figure, such as a loved pop star; or using the program as a way of exploring family resemblances. (This latter idea derives from the work of *avant garde* artists: see Welsh 1990; Willis, A-M, 1990; Lister 1995.)

The second project was with year eight students. Here the new form of *hypertext* was used as a way of exploring narrative. Hypertext is perhaps best defined as non-sequential narrative; but it also refers to the process whereby readers can determine their own versions of a text by the routes they follow through it (Landow 1992). It allows for links to be made between virtually any point in a text and another, or even between text, sound, image or digitised film. The notion of hypertext fits well with projects that encourage students to write extended fictions and with assignments which focus on narrative structure. Indeed, many critics now claim that hypertext itself is a qualitatively new way in which narrative can be structured (e.g. Bolter 1992). It is, they argue, a radical use of technology which is going to change conventional methods of reading linear narratives and accessing information (e.g. Tuman 1992). It also relates strongly to other kinds of computer texts, such as video games, where the distinction between 'reading' and 'playing' has become increasingly blurred. The player of a computer game could be seen as both a reader and a writer; the 'reader' follows pre-determined narratives, while the 'writer' interacts with the text in order to influence the progress and outcome of the story (see for example, Friedman 1995).

A unit of work was developed in which students were required to write extended choose-your-own-adventure stories in hypertext form using the programme *Hypercard*. This allows for sound and pictures to be set

alongside written text. Above all, it is a program that requires authors to conceptualise narrative structure. Authors can put text, image, sound and even video clips onto their projects and then build in navigational 'buttons' between screens that allow readers to move around at their own speed and according to their own interest. The project started with work taken from the widely-used booklet *Making Stories* (Mellor *et al* 1984). This uses a structuralist approach to fairy stories in order to encourage students to think about the relationships between plot and story. The teachers and myself then demonstrated an example of a *Hypercard* story, in order to exemplify the possibilities of the program. As in *Making Stories*, we sought to emphasise the ways in which narrative offers choice within structural constraints. The students were then split into groups of three and asked to devise stories which: [a] had reader choice built into them - that is, points in the narrative where readers could choose what could happen next from pre-given options; and [b] included pictures and sound as equal mechanisms with written text as ways of telling the tale. The choice of content was left to them. Having produced diagrammatic versions on paper of the stories they wanted to create, they were taught how to use the program and to make hypertext *stacks*, as *Hypercard* products are known.

The third project, with year ten, revolved around the study of the film *The Outsiders* (dir. Coppola 1983). The unit invited students to make posters and trailers for the film, as if repackaging it *either* for transmission on television in the near future, *or* for another audience which they had to specify (such as re-releasing it in another country). They also had to compare the ways in which narrative is related in the film and in the book on which it was based. In terms of assessment within English, the posters and trailers had to be seen as pretexts for oral work, since they could not be assessed in their own right; and the unit also included fictional and discursive writing.

The media production activities (the poster and the trailer) are in themselves commonplace at every level of the English curriculum. However, the students were directly taught about the ways these kinds of texts are constructed more explicitly than is normally the case within English. They were given a range of posters and trailers to analyse and spent some time considering how both forms of advertising target potential audiences. The class was then shown how image manipulation and video editing programs work. In groups of three, the students were asked to produce either a trailer or a poster for the film. They first had to input their chosen extracts from the film into the computer and then work with the digitised images.

It is worth re-iterating that this was the most explicit instruction in all of the three case studies for several reasons. I was attempting to offer more direct teaching than was customary for these students in their English lessons in order to show the English staff (with whom I was working) that media work in English might require different specialist skills. I was also trying to inject more genre-pedagogy into an environment dominated by the process tradition. As the conclusion to this chapter will show, this had a direct impact on how the students could be encouraged to reflect upon their work, and this contrasts with the Media Studies classrooms I have previously described.

Introducing students to the work

In many ways, the most conceptually demanding project was the year eight hypertext work. Although students might be familiar with computer games, and expressed more than a working knowledge of the choose-your-own-adventure books, hypertext stories are not (at present) a common form of cultural product. As I will discuss later, the most significant problem the students encountered was being able to distance themselves sufficiently as

writers of a text in order to imagine how different readers might read it: an issue I have already drawn attention to when considering the role of the audience in previous chapters. The project required them to make up stories with multiple routes through them. This was directly related to the choice of story genre. Making up stories is of course part and parcel of English, although in practice this only applies to certain kinds of stories. Being able to invent stories that focus on plot ingenuity - rather than 'rounded characters' or detailed description - requires a working knowledge of fictional genres that are different from those usually studied in English.

I shall show later how the students 'solved' these problems. Yet the difficulties they faced in coming to terms with the technology reflected a conundrum that is common to many forms of media production. As first time users, students obviously do not know what the technology can do; and since it is unfamiliar, and perhaps daunting, it may be difficult for them to envisage all the possibilities. (It is worth noting that in previous chapter, students who were successful in making media products had had some prior experience with the technology. The *Slutmo* group had certainly made magazines before and the photo-story classes had obviously used cameras before.) In addition, the students had to interpret the tasks they were set within the constraints of their prior knowledge of genre and narrative.

There was thus a tension between the need to find a recognisable genre of writing and the external, and largely unknown, constraints of the new form. There are therefore, a series of questions posed by the task itself which relate both to knowledge of *cultural forms* and practical experience of the *technology* - although at times these two discrete kinds of knowledge can become confused. These may be expressed as follows:

- Which comes first: the ability to write in non-linear narratives or the experience of reading them?

- Could the students invent non linear narratives without being competent users of the technology?

These questions may be represented in diagrammatic form:

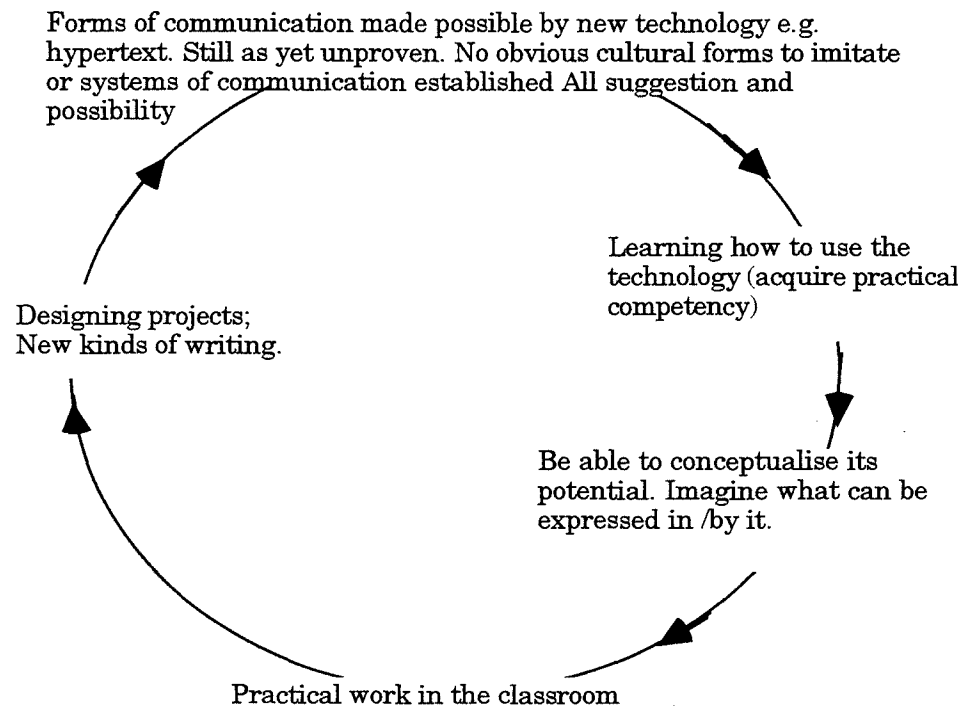


Fig. 7.1. The circular relationship between learning to use media technologies and working in new media forms.

This conundrum exists on a number of levels, beside that of production technology. In Chapter Five photographs produced by the 'identity' group showed a similar difficulty in that the students found it difficult to make work in genres that they hadn't encountered as readers; and in the previous chapter Mei King faced the same dilemma. On the other hand, the parodies and photo-story hybrids allowed the students some purchase on the task because they could orientate themselves within the context of the production, due to their prior experience of media consumption. I shall return, in a more general way, to this issue in the next chapter, but I am concerned here with the role the actual technology might play in this process.

However, one interesting question arising from this distinction between production technology and reading experience is the pedagogic one. I mentioned above that this chapter addresses students' prior experience in terms of skills, rather than conceptual understanding. Although students possess knowledge in both areas, *different* teaching strategies may be required to develop technical and conceptual competencies. However if, as here, the project does not distinguish between these levels, does it suggest some form of integrated teaching strategy could be used?

The year ten students who had the task of making posters, and to a lesser extent, the year seven users of *Morph*, encountered similar problems to those experienced by Mei King and the photographic 'identity group'. The image manipulation program, *Photoshop*, which we used for making the posters, is industry standard software and is extremely complex. Because the students had no experience of the program, they found it hard to imagine its potential to 'ghost', 'fuse' or 'filter' images. These terms refer to the processes that can be applied to elements of images within the program. They describe a number of 'transformations' that the computer carries out on the graphic element selected. The fact that they require use of a separate vocabulary as well as knowledge of their visual effect focused attention on the relationship between the linguistic and the conceptual dimension when introducing students to the program. However, because posters are a recognisable cultural form, unlike hypertexts, this problem of imagining potential was less pressing, in as much as the students could easily design a model on paper to start off with. The hypertext students could only start with different models, like the choose-your-own-adventure book.

Although this conundrum might have come to the fore working in new media forms it is, of course, implicit in students work in all forms of writing, *media-writing* included. However, it is expressed as a pedagogic problem, as in the genre debate (see Callaghan *et al* 1993). The issue here is the extent to which technical control of a medium is in itself either a

prerequisite or a substitute for the conceptual processes which go into composition. It is normally expressed as a chicken and egg pedagogic problem: should students be instructed how to use the relevant skills, as an end in themselves first; or are the skills needed in order to complete the task?

The students experienced this problem in a different way on the *Morph* project. While they might have seen morphing in the context of adverts or pop videos, they still experienced some difficulty in imagining what the final product might look like. They brought in a range of family photographs, some of which made no sense in terms of how the project had been set up. In the end, it proved difficult to use the technology as a way of exploring family identity *in the abstract*, much in the same way as the students who undertook the photography project (see Chapter Five above) found a direct exploration of identity problematic. Ultimately this activity seemed to become an opportunity simply to play with the technology for its own sake. This is not to de-value the heuristic value of play - that it may offer unique opportunities to learn by trial and error - but to note that if it does 'teach' in this way, students' *learning* may not be observed until much later in their lives, or indeed in other locations of the curriculum.

In addition, the project may have invaded the distance students understandably wanted to maintain between their family lives and the school environment. Several girls wanted to take the work home with them; and it is reasonable to infer that if they did get involved in the process of exploring family resemblances, they would have wanted to discuss the process within the family. The most notable example here was a girl who was persuaded by her mother to bring in pictures of her uncle and her father: morphing between each of these and a picture of the girl herself produced some interesting results! If this sense of personal space was important, it does suggest some important questions about the *Myself* project as a whole. Like a great deal of autobiographical work in English, it

is doubtful whether this kind of approach does in fact offer an authentic opportunity to explore the subjective realm of individual identity (Moss 1989). In this respect the sense of the personal directly and obliquely expressed in the work I have already looked at in the previous three chapters provides an interesting contrast to the demand to produce authentic experience implicit in this task. None of examples of *media writing*, from *Plaz* to *Slutmo*, started from the premise that the authors *should* write about themselves - however much I have suggested that the projects facilitated a personal interest.

Hypertext: conceptualising narrative

In comparison to all of the other examples of media production discussed in this study, the Morph project was a relative failure, in that it did not result in finished products. Of course, it may be that such an assignment performs other pedagogic functions but I was not able to follow this through either in terms of the students' learning or their class-work. By contrast, despite the use of complex technology, the year eight and ten work was completed in more or less the terms of the assignment. The most striking fact about the year eight hypertext work was the range of different genres used by the students as a way of fulfilling the brief. Although not all the projects were completed in hypertext form, the eight groups in the class composed narratives which are summarised below:

1. *Michael Jackson*. An unpopular boy called Tony gets tickets for a Michael Jackson concert. He has to decide who to take with him: his sister, his best friend or a popular boy. Whoever he takes then has to repay the debt in various ways. His sister either has to do chores or pay him money. The best

friend either does Tony's homework or gives him her walkman and the popular boy either makes Tony popular, or gets him onto the football team.

2. *The Baker*. A lonely baker is given a magic potion. He knocks it into his dough by accident and then has to decide whether to make a cream cake, a sponge cake or a bun. The cream cake is either bought by a pop star or an old lady; the bun is either bought by a girl or it runs away and is squashed by a car; and the sponge cake is either bought by a boy or it meets a girl sponge and falls in love.

3. *The Boyfriend*. There are two friends, Sharon and Tracy: one is lucky in love, while the other is unlucky. The lucky one brings home a boy whom her friend fancies. She has to decide what colour make-up to wear. If she wears blue, she is fancied by the boy; and she then has to decide whether 'to style it out' or blush red and run out of the room. If she styles it out, she can either go shopping for more drinks or drink by herself. (Unfortunately the consequences of wearing green or brown make-up are not clear from the finished product!).

4. *Haunted House*. A boy gets lost in a forest. At a scary moment, he can either follow a beautiful ghostly woman or he can go through a mysterious door. If he follows the woman, he then has to decide whether to kiss her or not, the choice of which leads either to a 'sexy' death or to safety. If he goes through the door, he dies in a miserable cellar.

5. *Mary's Nightmare*. Mary goes to visit her grandmother's grave on a spooky night. By accident she falls into the grave. She has three choices: she can either go down a bright tunnel or a dimly lit tunnel or climb out. If she climbs out, she is pursued by a wolf, so she has to escape either by running along a road or through some woods, which contain further adventures. The

bright tunnel takes her to a mysterious room with a weeping statue of her grandmother and a ladder. The dim tunnel takes her to a pit with goblins who offer her either a magic hat or a magic whistle.

6. *Halloween Night*. A rich girl and a punk decide whether to go trick or treating or go to a Halloween party. The first option leaves them with a choice of two doors: the first leads to a witch, the second a vampire. If they go to the party, they can either get drunk on beer or drink poisoned grapefruit juice which sends them to sleep for 1000 years until awakened by a punk's kiss.

7. *The Unsolved Murder*. The wife and best friend of Mr. Clinton Smooth want him murdered. If the reader gets the wife to do it, she will be a suspect; while the friend might not be strong enough and might confess. Alternatively a hitman would cost money. (See below)

8. *Paris*. A couple have to decide which pair of friends to take with them on holiday to Paris. Whichever pair they choose, the events of the holiday turn out differently. (Unfinished)

These brief summaries emphasise the ways in which the narratives are structured in binary terms of either/or choices (Rimmon-Kenan (1983). At the same time, they tend to flatten out the subtlety of some of the work, whilst also disguising some of the more confused narratives. *The Unsolved Murder*, for example, doesn't give choices at the end of each page but it does have 'buttons', so the reader can move from page to page. The final page 'tells you the answer' as follows:

TIME TO KILL HIM

Now its time to kill him and who should do it Laura, Carol or the hitman, they have decided that Laura would kill him this is how it turn out.

HITMAN = The hitman tried to kill him but he did not succeed because he didn't have enough strength

LAURA = Laura tried to kill her husband but did not succeed because in a way she still loved him.

CAROL = Carol did succeed and killed him in a very horrible way.

There is then an 'end' button that thanks you for 'playing our game', spoken by the students. The reference to the product as a game is revealing. At the beginning of the task, the same group had asked me whether they 'could do it like *Crime Monthly*, where you have to solve the murder' and suggested that they would make it 'like *Cluedo*'. However, the final product seems to have already 'played out' the game for future readers, thus making it more like a completed story.

Games and stories appear to differ in terms of the illusion of control they give to consumers: stories explicitly guide the reader, whereas game players think they do it for themselves. The ability to think through the ramifications of an *interactive* product as opposed to constructing a fixed narrative completely baffled one group. The makers of 'The Boyfriend' never seemed to grasp the point that they had to make an open-ended story, rather than solve the narrative problems themselves: they wanted to close off the narrative by making one of the make-up choices better than the others. This may derive from the kind of magazine story or advice column where there are clear right and wrong choices to be made.

This highlights one central difference between this project and a great deal of conventional writing in English. This kind of work requires authors to imagine in a very explicit way how a reader will interact with

their text. Furthermore, the writer has to take account of the ways in which the reader changes and learns as they read. To write hypertexts, or interactive games, writers have to put hypothetical readers at the heart of the act of writing. In theory of course, this is true of all writing. While *Pony* may have found this difficult to do - partly for personal reasons and partly due to the generic nature of the school story he was working in - the parodic projects I have looked at clearly took this concept on board. However, because this mode of writing forces authors to be explicit about the effects they want to achieve, it may encourage the process of 'de-centring' that beginning writers can find so difficult. This may be an important claim for media production in general, that it *actualises* the implied reader in more specific terms. (Of course, I would accept that it may be the *context* of the media classroom that develops the work in this way and not any *intrinsic* qualities in the nature of media production; but this requires further investigation.)

There are two further caveats here. The first relates to the ways in which these students themselves referred to hypothetical readers. The *Michael Jackson* group, who produced by far the most polished product, described how readers might interact on a 'micro' level:

- Oh I know, you lot, you know Tony's hand? We could put a button on Tony's hand so when people press Tony, he says:
- Oh I know, *Good Morning*
- No. He says, *Hello* [heavily accented in a stupidly sexy way]
- Yeah, that's sweet!
- Yeah, that's good. Who's gonna do it?

They can clearly imagine how an outsider might derive pleasure and narrative information from responding to the textual cues they can build in.

But when asked who might read their work or whether they could imagine books like theirs being produced in the future, one of the authors replied:

You know children at the age of say, ten. They usually don't like reading that much. They find it boring. And this [Michael Jackson] makes them interested and try to watch it out and that. If you make it too long, then they'd find it boring.

The easy generalisations about younger children and the superficial reference to 'boredom' indicate the difficulty of imagining real readers - even though they clearly can conceive of how people in general might read their text. In the end, however, this may simply reflect the fact that so much of these students' experience of writing is solely directed towards the teacher.

Secondly, one should be cautious about the claim that it is this mode of writing in itself that makes a process of de-centring possible. Eco (1979) argues that different *genres* 'inscribe' different readers within their typical narrative structures. The range of genres chosen by the class clearly picks up from the earlier work they had done on fairy stories; and the mix of fantasy, social realism and horror is typical of writing in many English classrooms (Moss 1989). The horror and crime stories are closest to games - as indicated by the reference to *Cluedo* - and do already exist in interactive forms in the shape of the choose-your-own-adventure story. The different forms of address to hypothetical readers which characterise these genres are largely replicated in the students' work. Yet while their interpretation of the task may have begun from safe generic structures, in keeping with the model of writing I have observed above, these became progressively mixed or *hybridised* as the project developed and their familiarity with the technology grew.

For example, the *Michael Jackson* group moved beyond their initial concern with structure and began to consider the ways in which sound and

picture could be combined with text. Having planned the narrative, they then used the potential of the program to elaborate and develop it further. For example, on the first card of their stack they pasted a picture of Tony. This image is taken from a bank of clip art that comes with the program. However, it was their exploration of the program that suggested this image, not a pre-existent sense of the character in the first place:

- Let's use that gimpy guy.
- I love that gimpy guy!
- [with an acted voice] Hiya Tony
- Let's put a picture of him on page 1.

The more images they found, the more they used the ability to create parallel narratives in image and sound as a way of providing an ironic commentary on their original plot. Thus they chose to make the way he spoke as comic as the picture they chose to represent him:

- So when people press Tony he says...
- Oh I know, *Good Morning*
- No, he says *Hello* [heavily accented]
- Yeah, that's sweet!

The tones of voice, impossible to reproduce here, make Tony a figure of fun. By using the sound track, the girls are able to create a more distanced perspective on the character.

It would seem that this process of transforming plot into a multi-levelled narrative occurred *during* the production process and particularly through group discussion. This ability to add play-acted voices was used to send up other characters. Likewise, the snippets of songs sung by the girls or recorded onto the stack provide another form of authorial commentary.

For example, the funky dance number, Stevie V's *Dirty Cash*, was recorded over a picture of the money bag that Tony's sister gives him as a possible repayment for the Jackson tickets. The effect of this is to give the story a contemporary cultural frame of reference, even though this works against the tone and plot line of the story.

These injections of irony and parody are part of the way this group exercised control over their work and set out to entertain themselves and their friends who read it. For example, by the end of the piece, when the popular boy is trying to make Tony popular, they ended up writing: 'It was quite hard to get Tony popular because everyone knew that Tony was a DORK!' This comment was added in when they arrived at that stage, as their work on the earlier cards had led them to this inevitable conclusion.

All these subsequent re-workings of the original story derive quite clearly from the *social* nature of group production. The production becomes a kind of open-ended dialogue where opinions, feelings and jokes can all be shared and exchanged. Listening to them at the screen, it became impossible to distinguish individuals from a choric voice at work. Here they are talking about selecting an image to illustrate a card:

- The jacket..
- We can change it.
- Yeah, put back...
- Oh no, we pasted it
- Who cares?
- [laughter]
- Just do another one.

As students become confident about what they are doing, as they begin to share some of their work in discussion or with their peers and the teacher, other possible interpretations of the narrative become apparent and they

act on these. The action they take may conflict with previous ideas, but because an attitude of experimentation (in this case) prevailed, they tended to go with the flow. Of course it is not unreasonable to expect students to change their minds: indeed, it would be worrying if they had such fixed ideas about the finished product that they did not develop them through the production process. In this respect the model of writing here is not only clearly *dialogic*, it is almost akin to an oral performance, as advocated by process-writing pedagogy (Graves 1983).

Selling *The Outsiders*

By contrast, the work undertaken by the year ten students was considerably less free in its attitudes towards form and audience. Producing trailers and posters places the authors and readers of such products in a significantly different position compared with those established by the hypertexts I have just described. Considering this work also requires us to engage with the *simulated* situation, where students are invited to take on the role of media producers within the framework of the commercial marketplace, as opposed to the emphasis on individual expression typically found in the English classroom.

The students had read the book, on which the film of *The Outsiders* is based, in year nine, well before we contemplated using the film version for this project. It tells the story of inter-gang rivalry in an American town split along class lines: the working class kids are 'greasers' and the middle class kids, 'soc's'. The hero of the story, Ponyboy Curtis, is orphaned and brought up by his elder brother. Indeed, much of the story's appeal derives from its focus on orphaned inter-male relationships, a theme emphasised by Coppola's canny casting of 'brat pack stars' like Matt Dillon, Ralph Macchio, Thomas Howell, Patrick Swayze, Emilio Estevez and Tom Cruise.

Although the outcomes of this project - trailers and posters - are typical Media Studies products, I want to argue that using digital production processes significantly affected the kind of learning which took place here. As I have argued, the use of the *Morph* program only seemed to emphasise the superficial and redundant aspects of new technology: amazing but pointless. On the other hand, making hypertexts is clearly only possible using multimedia technology. However, to repeat the hypothesis outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the test in this case is whether the multimedia technology makes a *qualitative difference* to the learning. If the products had been made using conventional analogue technology, would the students have learnt 'less', or learnt something different? In this case, the technology clearly makes for 'better quality' products when compared with the results of drawing, storyboarding or cutting and sticking usually employed in media education or indeed in English - although this does not in itself tell us a great deal about the quality of the learning.

Unlike, say, drawing posters on paper, which in theory encourages students to think about the 'big idea' behind a film, using image manipulation programs requires an almost microscopic attention to detail that could easily obscure the conceptual intent behind the task. For example, one of the poster groups needed to use a still of Patrick Swayze (see Appendix Four for sample posters from this project). Having discussed in detail which sequence from which scene contained the image they wanted, they focused on a part of the sequence where he turns from right to left and then chose the exact profile they wanted from a second-long piece of the film. This process was interesting on two levels. First, it demonstrated an aesthetic awareness: they wanted him to look in a particular direction in order to ensure that all the stars on that poster were looking in the same direction. Secondly, it indicated a level of knowledge and recall that clearly derived from their viewing of the film outside school. Indeed, discussion about Patrick Swayze's movements was coloured by the film's cult status

and the students' enthusiasm for its male stars. The fact that the three students making this poster could share this kind of detailed knowledge highlights a level of affective investment characteristic of media work of this kind.

While it might be possible to access this level of knowledge and interest through critical analysis, being able to *control* the film and work almost directly with the images and sequences in this way allowed for a whole host of informal knowledge gleaned from home viewing of the film to be used as part of the task. Indeed, I would want to make the larger claim that being able to handle the film in 'virtual' form, frame by frame, or image by image, may transform the power relations that normally obtain between text and viewer¹. Academic debates within Media Studies have veered between an emphasis on the power of the text and the claim for the power of the reader (see Morley 1992). Yet however mentally active viewers may be, they are physically limited in terms of what they can *do* with the text. Image manipulation of this kind gives a physical control over the material far in excess of freeze-framing or fast-forwarding material on video. This argument effectively extrapolates Landow's (1992) discussion of the relationship between hypertext and critical theory to other forms of digital manipulation.

Exercising control over the film in this way is thus akin to a kind of critical reading of literary texts, where one can extract quotations or mark the margins as a way of supporting one's reading and interpretation (see the sections on 'Information Writing' and 'Note Taking' in Richmond *et al* (n.d.) for parallel strategies in English). Viewing and re-viewing, noting down shots, shaving frames off clips and simply poring over the desktop with its frame-by-frame representation of the film clip, the sound track or the kind of edit used forces the students to adopt a high level of

¹ Those fortunate enough to watch film on an editing table tell me that this is comparable at a conceptual level. Nevertheless the speed, flexibility and especially the capacity to experiment in non-linear processes take the underlying principle to a different level and certainly make it more accessible.

concentration and attention to detail. One of the trailer groups made this point in discussion:

Helen: You sort of notice, like say, what's he called? Johnny?

Nuriye: Yeah, Johnny.

Helen: Yeah, Johnny and the way he doesn't get on with his parents which leads him to run away, and you don't seem to think about that so much.

[...]

Nuriye: Yeah, when you first watch it, the main story is about Ponyboy and his brother. When you watch it again in this way, it's all together.

Nuriye's last comment 'when you watch it again *in this way*, it's all together' seems to refer both to the demands of the simulation (in that they have to watch the film for the specific purpose of making the trailer) and to the microscopic detail in which they work with the film text.

Of course, the same kind of concentration is equally necessary for editing on analogue equipment. In a sense, the same kind of 'discipline' is required. Yet multimedia technology allows a level of virtual modelling and experimentation which enables ideas to be played around with almost immediately and, most importantly, to be *visualised*. This facility, of being able to test out ideas with no loss of final quality, to look at one person's idea and evaluate it within the group, is more than just a question of immediacy and access. By contrast, analogue processes require an ability to conceptualise the finished product, dependent on training, imagination and what is sometimes called 'visual literacy' (see Chapter Two above).

It is helpful to distinguish here between the conventional phases in media production: *pre-production* (planning and devising), *production* (in films this would be shooting) and *post-production* (again in films this would

refer to editing, dubbing, titling etc.). Likewise, making posters in traditional ways requires a 'pre-production' level of competence: the whole finished product has to be conceptualised, either designed 'in the head' or in sketch form, before actually beginning the process of making or producing it. The digital processes allow real manipulation of actual images from the film (leading to a higher quality of product), whereas traditional work of this kind in both Media Studies and in English is likely to be drawn or sketched. More fundamentally, however, they support the design process through which students might actually conceptualise the product in the first place. This latter process is normally invisible to the outsider, or is often described in mysterious terms like 'creative' or 'artistic'. In effect, digital processes begin to blur the distinction between *pre-production* and *production*.

The finished products support this argument. First of all, using the actual images rather than requiring students to draw them (which in practice usually means referring to images recalled from the film) makes the task more 'real' in terms of the simulated production scenario. Secondly, the students can model their ideas at the screen. Such discussions might appear opaque to an outsider: phrases like 'move it there' or 'click' or 'smallen that' are external manifestations of a dialogue with the screen and they don't mean much beyond that context. Nevertheless, the kinds of narrative relationships established through the arrangement of the portrait shots of the cast or the positioning of those shots over the background can be discussed and negotiated by the group, rather than appearing as a product of individual artistic imagination.

However, if the process facilitates aspects of the construction, it does not replace the capacity to imagine the final product - even if one might expect students to do this more effectively as they become more familiar with the programs. This is apparent simply by comparing the different backgrounds the students chose for their posters. Several of the groups

didn't actually put in backgrounds until it was pointed out to them that they would need to colour in the spaces between the pictures of the stars or leave them blank. Whereas doing the process manually would actually require them to colour in physically, doing the work digitally allowed them to make good their errors. On the other hand, in one notable example, the students selected a full screen image to use as their background. This is important on a number of levels beyond the immediate aesthetic effect. The image is golden in colour, which feeds off the poetic motif in the text where Ponyboy quotes a phrase from a Robert Frost poem about lost youth. It is also part of a flashback sequence about Pony's dead parents, an important emotional moment in the film. Their selection of it as the background image reflects its importance in their reading of the film. It also implies that the narrative function of the *background* has been understood in the first place: i.e. it establishes a frame against which other images (and events) can derive meaning. Because the program requires backgrounds to be positioned in the first stage of any complex montage, it also means that the students had to reach this level of understanding at the appropriate stage of the production sequence.

From storyboards to imagining film

This facility to construct work conceptually is nowhere more evident than in students' uses of the storyboard. Storyboards have always been used as a basic tool in cinematography. The Film Studies text book *Film Art* gives examples of the ways in which complex action and special effects sequences would be drawn frame by frame as an annotated script for a film crew (Bordwell and Thompson 1979). Pudovkin (1929) refers to a '*working* - that is, a ready for shooting - form of scenario provid[ing] in itself the detailed description of each, even the smallest piece [of the film], citing every

technical method required for its execution.' Above all, as I showed in Chapter One, he stressed the importance of *editing* in creating the meaning of film, the process most obviously made explicit in detailed drawings of this kind.

However, early media education programmes stressed the value of 'scenarios' and 'shooting scripts', rather than storyboards (Peters 1961); indeed it is only relatively recently that media educators have placed so much emphasis on the role of the storyboard (see assignments in the Cambridge A level syllabus: Buckingham *et al* 1995, Chapter Eight). In practice, much storyboarding activity is often used as a form of classroom control, particularly where there is a scarcity of equipment: it is a way of finding something for students to do when it is not possible for them to make real films. Ideally, storyboarding should serve to develop students' ability both to visualise *before* shooting and to conceptualise how the film will be edited *after* shooting - although these two functions are often confused. Nevertheless, storyboarding is rarely taught as a discrete skill; and unless students are already experienced film or video makers, aspects such as shot time or camera angle are rarely meaningful. In my experience, students often tend to use single images to stand in for whole scenes rather than accurately write down a shot-by-shot analysis (*cf.* the boys' photo-stories in Chapter Five).

Vygotsky's (1962) notion of 'scaffolding' may be useful and appropriate here. In media education, the storyboard is intended to fulfil the intermediate function of supporting students' abilities to *conceptualise narrative* - or so it would appear from GCSE and A-level syllabi. However, as described in the diagram above, there is a *Catch 22* situation here. In order for students to become fluent film or video makers, they would need to use the storyboard as a way of visualising and representing ideas; but they need to have some experience of video making in the first place in order to be able to *make use* of a storyboard in the actual production process. Rather

like the use of a background images in the poster work, there needs to be an element of trial and error here. Here again, the relationship between technology and creativity is a circular one.

This is where the virtual storyboard on the computer screen can make a difference. The program used allows for the video to be laid out frame by frame along a time line. Whereas experienced film-makers can use storyboards as an economic way of drafting ideas, inexperienced students, who may well be fluent 'readers' of film, cannot make an automatic transition to being 'writers' of film. However, the desktop storyboard gives students a purchase on the editing process which is frequently absent from work of this kind. The key to digital editing is that it represents the ideas directly in front of you. Students can thus see immediately the consequences of their decisions about pace, shot selection, sound, editing transitions etc.. By contrast, unless (like Pudovkin) they have 'scenarists' who can envisage the detailed workings of final edited film, analogue processes require film-makers to imagine their ideas until they are finally realised in the cutting room.

This contrast between the experienced and inexperienced film maker draws attention to the questions about pedagogy raised at the beginning of this chapter, in that I am suggesting that the virtual processes may be scaffolding students' attempts to transform passive or informally learnt knowledge and thereby converting it to more formal kinds of knowledge about the ways texts are constructed.

From a pedagogic perspective, this kind of project is deliberately not an 'open' creative or imaginative assignment; and as such, it aims to provide the kind of scaffolding described. In more open-ended assignments, such as those described in the previous chapter, students are required to visualise the final product *and* to conceive of how it will be edited from the very start. Indeed the media production in all previous chapters was not as clearly *taught* as it was here, and I want to return to this issue in the next chapter.

Using the support offered by the virtual storyboard enables students to learn explicitly about this stage of the process before moving on to the next. Thus, students' discussions about the editing of the trailer illustrated the ways in which they were learning to articulate the conventions of continuity editing. For example, the following extract is concerned with the rules of 'match on action' and eyeline (see Bordwell and Thompson 1979).

Helen: It's quite nice 'cos it's like him looking back and then someone's quite sharp.

Nuriye: Oh yeah.

[...]

Nuriye: If we put the punch there it'll be like him, Johnny, him turning to look at Ponyboy.

Helen: Ponyboy wants to get punched in the face.

Nuriye: So shall we delete that?

Helen: We'll change that.

Here, the students understand that the sequence of the punch will be read as if continuous with the following shot of Ponyboy, thus distorting the plot line of the film. It would also confuse the relationship between Johnny and Ponyboy.

Although these conventions can of course be taught through the use of drawn storyboards, the students' understanding here has come about through correcting a 'mistake'. This open way of working through experimentation is, one can speculate, a natural stage in the way experienced film-makers might experiment as they write their own storyboards. By comparison, when writing prose the developmental stage is invisible as writers struggle to find the right word or phrase in their heads - although here again, there may be a difference between writing on paper and word processing on a computer (see Lanham 1993; Heim 1993). In this

respect, these students' work could be likened to the process of learning to write through drafting, crossing out and reworking ideas in the writing workshop tradition (Graves 1983) .

Evaluating the products

As I have noted, one of the major aims of both the year ten projects was to encourage students to think about the marketing of films to particular target audiences. In our preparatory work, we asked the students to analyse how both trailers and posters offer what Ellis (1982) calls a 'narrative image'. While most of the work did succeed in creating some kind of narrative image, some of the posters were clearly more effective than others. There tended to be a certain amount of imitation of others' work, partially because the background used by one group (already discussed) was so admired and partially because the second group of poster-makers used the bank of images provided by the first group rather than scanning the film for themselves. All the groups used portrait pictures of the stars, which is obviously a significant convention in film posters - although again, this is also indicative of their interest in the film. However, the most effective work established a kind of tension between the images which does, in effect, construct a narrative within the frame of the poster.

The formal qualities are also instructive. Many of the portraits are carefully arranged so that the gazes of the stars to the left and right are centred on the viewer and the composition of the different elements is balanced. These compositional elements reflect the students' readings of the film. For example, one poster positions the characters Dally and Johnny outside of the embracing family group. This balance reflects the salient oppositions within the original text; and if these students had expressed

this structural awareness in prose as part of a discursive essay there is no doubt it would have been well received.

While the finished products appeared comparatively 'professional', this was not so obviously the case in the use of lettering, both for the title and other verbal information. Despite the equipment's facility for manipulating fonts and type sizes, and despite the fact that this part of the project could draw on competencies developed in word processing, none of the finished products were as confident in their use of written words as they were with the images. Ironically, the kind of information that would have made the students' work look like the 'real thing' - giving all the details of the various production or distribution responsibilities - is mundane. In practice, this would certainly have meant a lot of copying out. Judged either as expressive or critical readings of the text, the posters did their job; and in strict design terms, some of the posters clearly fulfilled the brief of the industrial simulation, which required them to re-package the film.

However, this is to evaluate the work in 'media education' terms (see the final sections to both Chapters One and Two). As I have noted, the principal aim of designing a poster within English would be to provide a new approach to reading the text: summarising the book in a single image may serve to focus students' attention on the key themes and relationships within it. By contrast, in a Design subject, the emphasis would be on replicating the formal elements that comprise posters, and on the display of technical competence. Within media education, however, students are generally required to be explicit about the audience they are targeting and to reflect *theoretically* on the relations between text and audience - although, as noted in the previous chapter, evidence of this kind of reflection is generally expected to be contained in the accompanying writing.

In the case of these students, however, their writing did not contain evidence of this kind. The 'logs' they wrote answered some leading questions

set by the teachers, but none of the students referred directly to the implied audiences for the film. This was partly due to the problem the students had in differentiating between themselves as the audience and other kinds of possible viewers. In addition, since the film already has a real audience, being asked to conceptualise a new one can appear redundant. However, what is really revealing about these accounts is the students' attitude towards the analytical work on posters which began the unit of work. Of course my different role in instructing students about this topic may be influential here, compared with the absence of these kinds of responses in Chapters Five and Six, for example. Half the students justified their own work in these terms:

The poster analysis we did came in really useful. We used quite a few ideas from 'real posters' and put them into our own. For example, we used a lot of ghosting effects which we would never have thought of before.

On the other hand, some were concerned about their inability to reproduce the 'real thing':

The aspects of my poster that are unlike real posters are that my poster doesn't give any information about the ratings or the producers.

Part of the problem here is that in National Curriculum, G.C.S.E. English, students are not generally asked to reflect on the writing process as part of a writing assignment. As noted above (see also Buckingham 1990b), there is a sense in which, for these students, writing in English is perceived as an end in itself, even where it involves the use of existing styles or genres: students are not generally asked to reflect explicitly on

why they used particular plot formulae or stylistic conventions. In media education, on the other hand, this kind of explicit reflection is seen as an essential way in which 'theory' and 'practice' are related.

Likewise, the trailer activity drew on a number of media production and reading competencies, although these were rarely made a focus for explicit analysis. For example, although in classic film theory there are four basic kinds of edits (cut, dissolve, fade and wipe), the digital editing program offered about fifty special effects which could perform this function. These are 'dragged' onto the virtual storyboard and manipulated to take the correct amount of time. The temptation is to use all sorts of special effects for their own sake. However, after the initial rush of enthusiasm for pop-video-style effects had worn off, the students found the discipline of the advertising trailer a salutary corrective, and they economised on special effects to maximise impact. None of the trailers used more than three or four unusual transitions, and these were used emphatically to further the narrative. Thus, the effect in which one scene opens, iris-like, from the middle of another scene was used to convey the sense that the second scene emerges from the 'heart' of the first. This also drew attention to the core of the family grouping with their arms around each other.

These technical competencies were matched by the students' use of voice-over and in particular the pace and timing of the thirty or so clips that they used in their work. These qualities are notoriously difficult to define, and they tend to be discussed by teachers as issues of taste and judgement (Fraser forthcoming). It is difficult to put into words why clips should be only three rather than four seconds long: yet one might have expected these students to be able to explain why the narrative structure of their trailer used the thirty or so clips it did and in the order it did. In particular, one might expect the task of *marketing* the film would force them to be explicit about defining the audience, and so affect the narrative that they actually

constructed. Yet here the students resorted to the bland discourse of film criticism:

Helen: It wasn't so much a story, it was just trying to fit all the scenes we wanted in some order.

Nuriye: We tried to balance them out.. not too much -

Helen: VIOLENCE.

Nuriye: - and not too much soppy stuff

Helen: So we just spread it out easily.

The concepts of 'spreading out' or 'balancing' could be seen to reflect neo-classical values of harmony and balance; while the categories of 'violence' and 'soppy stuff' derive more from everyday critical discourse about the media. These judgements were given social credibility by the way in which both girls then hypothesised a 'parent' and a 'stereotypical teenage girl' watching their trailer: both, they argued, would find enough to keep them interested, without being offended by what they might watch.

Nevertheless, the girls' explanation here does not adequately account for the careful way in which the narrative of their trailer is structured; and it completely fails to account for its thoughtful reworking of the story. This may - to pursue the Vygotskian model of conceptual learning developed above - imply that however 'literate' their reading of the film and their creation of the trailer might be, they do not possess (and in fact have not been taught) an academic language in which they can express their understandings - that is, a vocabulary with which they can analyse media language. In this respect, these students provide an interesting contrast with both the positions of Emma and Zerrin, discussed in the last chapter.

Conclusion

In many respects, the projects described in this chapter represent familiar practice, both in English and in media education. Yet the technology and the curriculum location of this work have raised some larger questions about the relationship between technology and creative writing. In particular, the work suggests a rather different approach to the relationship between *reading* and *writing*. As I have indicated, the academic discipline of Media Studies has tended to regard these as contrasting opposites, and to privilege the former. By and large, the *purpose* of media production in Media Studies has been defined in terms of conceptual learning, rather than in terms of either 'self-expression' or imitating genres, or even in terms of the control of technical skills. There is a striking contrast here with English which has always regarded the teaching of writing as one of its prime aims; although different traditions in different ways, have privileged the activity of writing as an end in itself, or as a means to another end (see Maybin 1994 p. 193/4).

On one level, the new digital technologies would appear to create significant new possibilities for media production. Yet new technologies inevitably interact with existing cultural forms and patterns of social use. As the first two case studies in the chapter have shown, the abstract possibilities made available by digital multimedia are transformed into specific cultural forms in particular social settings. In some ways, *hypertext* does represent a new cultural form; yet the students appropriated and used it in terms of their existing cultural experiences and knowledge, in a similar fashion to the ways that the older students in Chapter Five re-used the photo-story form for their own ends. By contrast, the potential of *Morph* did not appear to connect with these students' concerns and imaginations in any meaningful way. The technologies do undoubtedly offer new expressive

possibilities; but these are not guaranteed outcomes or indeed inherent qualities of the technology itself.

On the other hand, the technologies do clearly make certain aspects of the production process much more accessible than in the past. Digital editing, for example, is significantly more flexible than its analogue equivalent. In the case of image manipulation, the technical quality of the finished product is undeniably better than the results of more traditional cut-and-paste methods. Yet this is more than simply a technical matter. Bringing certain aspects of the process - such as editing - within reach, enables students to acquire much greater control over the conceptualisation of the finished product. The systematic *experimentation* with a wider range of possibilities - and hence the *conscious* selection of a final version - are made much more explicit as a focus of discussion and debate.

At the same time, digital editing and image manipulation appear to enable students to work more *directly* with the media. This can have paradoxical effects. First, it allows *writers* to work in almost intuitive ways - thus appearing to naturalise the writing process, to efface the distance between thought and image and to make transparent the constructed nature of the text. Secondly, and perhaps at the same time, it can also offer a means by which *reading* (and *writing*) can be made explicit. For those possessing the relevant meta-languages it makes visible the constructed nature of the text and enables writers to reflect upon how meanings are made. 'Older' technologies establish barriers at many stages of the production process, not least to do with the *skills* that are required. For many years, these barriers certainly prevented school students from producing media work with which they themselves could be satisfied. They appeared to stand in the way of students fully learning to write *fluently*. They inhibited experimentation and disqualified learners from writing as they might in English - drafting, and re-shaping their work as they went along. Yet on the other hand, these barriers also represented points at

which students were forced to be explicit about their aims, and to reflect upon what they had achieved thus far. This would certainly be the case in the photo-stories produced in Chapter Five.

The fact that this process of explicit reflection not really take place in any of projects here may be partly to do with their location within English, where reflection of this kind, at this school, rarely seemed to be a central concern. However, it may also be a consequence of the more 'intuitive' aspects of the technology. While the accessibility of the technology is attractive, it should not lead to forms of media production that regard the medium itself as transparent, and the production process as simply a matter of individual creative expression.

In the introduction to this chapter I suggested that the oppositions between 'imitation' and 'expression' in the process vs. genre schools may be unhelpful. My account of the paradoxical effects of *writing* in digital media has shown how both of these models might appear to be operating at the same time. My distinctions between a transparent and constructed text to an extent, replicate the process/genre divide, but my notion of paradoxical effects is intended to point towards a synthesis of these approaches. Indeed, the dialectal movement I suggest, between 'reflection' and 'direct expression' indicates a strategy to bring both traditions together. However, I am not suggesting this synthesis occurs *because* of the technology, but because the newness of the production experience for the students has allowed me to observe this double approach in action. Equally I have argued that it is the collision of pedagogic frameworks - bringing , in this instance, a greater 'genre' approach from Media Studies to the 'process' environment of English - which has thrown these issues into relief. It is not so much that digital media offer *new* opportunities for writing, but like the media technologies that have preceded them, these new technologies should give rise to a much more wide-ranging reconsideration of our fundamental notions of production or *writing*. It is to this that we now turn.

In general the case study method in educational research can lead to a rather diffuse sense of conclusion. In earlier chapters I have used the metaphor of a mosaic but on reflection this whole study seems rather like an archaeological discovery of a mosaic: there is incredibly intricate work in discrete areas which *suggests* the whole picture, but by definition the whole picture - a model of *media writing* as a component of media literacy - is only something which can be inferred from the extant evidence. The four detailed accounts in the preceding chapters have tried to address the questions laid out in Chapter Two, albeit in different ways. I now want to draw all the data together in order to reflect upon my research agenda. The structure for this chapter is first of all to describe my 'findings' and then to indicate some of the limitations of my research. Finally I will raise a series of further questions in terms of theory and pedagogy, thus pointing the way towards further research in this field.

At the risk of sounding banal I will lay out my findings as simple bullet point sentences (see Buckingham 1996, Chapter Nine). It is helpful to subdivide these into four categories: definite findings, well founded hunches, new questions for further research and methodological implications - although these categories may be best thought of on a sliding scale. Such a system allows me to be cautious about generalising from limited data at the same time as justifying the kind of intuitive analysis - grounded theory - I have sought to develop in this thesis.

Despite my caution about generalising from qualitative research (see Chapter Three) this approach is a succinct way of laying the foundations for further discussion. There are also different kinds of generalisation operating here. Thus, whilst it is perfectly reasonable to generalise from these four case studies - and in particular to generalise from data *across* the case studies - I also recognise that my findings cannot be seen as representative of the larger

population. However, the overall aim of this study is to theorise the practice of making media within a context of a broader re-thinking of contemporary theories of literacy. From this perspective I am merely claiming that my discussion of the data has raised enough questions to challenge and extend any model of literacies underpinning media education. I would argue that the data I collected is sufficiently typical to enable such a challenge to take place *at this level*, and that the generalisations I offer can, at the least, contribute to some account of a theory of learning in this subject. The virtual absence of other research in this field works in my favour, in that I am offering a theory of 'media learning' based on classroom research; whereas other theories of learning in media education have tended to derive more from the cultural politics of the subject (see Chapter One), or perhaps to be imported from other subjects. It is here that models of language use and acquisition from English have played such a dominant role; and it is partly these models I set out to critique in my research. In general, however, most of the pedagogic theories employed to justify or rationalise media production in media education are not derived from systematic observations of young people's work in this subject. Despite its limitations I am suggesting my research performs this function and in so doing, changes the terms of the debate.

Research outcomes

[1] Findings

- *The students utilised a wide range of their cultural experiences when making media.*

The eclectic range of references from diverse genres and media forms used by the young people in the restricted tasks set surprised me. For me there are

important distinctions between different literacy modes - print, visual and moving image - but these were not significant for the young people at these school sites. Equally, students drew from their own experience of power relations in terms of gender, race, class and age and the ways in which these experiences are represented in the media (e.g. *The Chippendales* and black murderers in *The Rude Boy Serial Killings*, described in Chapter Five).

- *These students used formal knowledge derived from their consumption e.g. generic codes and conventions.*

Although the 'grammatical' accuracy of the works made varied, all the students used some kind of knowledge about media forms in their production work. The kind of knowledge used may have been drawn from other literacy modes (e.g. *Jill and Meg's Excellent Adventure*) and as I shall discuss below, was used with differing degrees of meta-linguistic awareness, but was present at all times. This issue is crucial to an understanding of the relationship between reading and writing.

- *Students make generically hybrid media products.*

This is one of the most obvious findings, in that virtually all the work produced demonstrated elements of generic hybridity. There are however, three levels of syncretism operating at the same time. The work produced mixed up generic forms, e.g. comics, hip hop art and film narrative techniques in *The Rude Boy Serial Killings*. At the same time students synthesised issues from the range of 'models' used, e.g. questions about the representation of race with the concerns of 'stock' characters from school stories in the same piece. Finally the conditions of producing media work in the school environment positions students as hybrid writers. They are asked to take a

number of roles as writers, as simultaneously 'creative youth', 'deferential child', the 'learner' and the 'artist'.

- *Students make media work in school for non-academic aims (i.e. their peers).*

I was struck in virtually all of these case studies how much the students seemed to be 'writing' for real audiences. The fact that most of the work was directly displayed to a wider audience rather than filtered through the teacher is relevant here. Peer response was important to the authors. This dimension seems to relate strongly to arguments in English about the need to write for real audiences and I will take up the implications below.

[2] Well founded hunches

- *There was a correlation between those students who could make use of formal knowledge about texts and those who produced the more meaningful products.*

Although this research was not set up to ascertain the most effective teaching methods in making media, and in no ways did it follow the model of evaluation or what Cohen and Manion (1994) call '*ex post facto*' research, it has drawn attention to the ways in which some media productions seem to be more successful than others (see especially Chapters Five and Seven). There is clearly a need for further research to develop criteria defining 'success' in this area, but on the basis of the work described here, it seems fair to say that students who demonstrated explicit knowledge and self-conscious control of the formal aspects of genre. etc. in their chosen medium produced work which more effectively communicated with external readers.

- *Students invest in media products both personally, and simultaneously in relation to the ways they are positioned as audiences for the mass media.*

One constant theme throughout this study has been the relationship between the individual and the social. Much of the work discussed (e.g. *Plaz* and *Slutmo*) indicates that the authors work with a model of the *generic self*. This 'half a contradiction' suggests that on the one hand authors foreground a personal sense of themselves in their work (e.g. *Pony* and *Zerrin*), but at the same time they have a sense of themselves as a social construct, and here the discourses of race or gender seem to predominate (e.g. *Plaz*, *Clever Clare*). What is more, this second self is very much defined in terms of how the students are positioned as readers or consumers of media culture. Seeing oneself as merely the member of a mass audience (the young women who made *Slutmo*) is thereby reconcilable with seeing oneself as a unique individual. I have also hinted throughout that these kinds of projects which engage with identity in this way, provide an interesting contrast to the demand in some elements of the English curriculum, to produce authentic experience in the form of autobiographies.

- *Working in groups does not deny the group product a personally expressive value.*

Continuing this theme of the relationship between the self and the social, it is clear that despite the fact that most of the work discussed emanated from a collective process, it may still possess affective value for *individual* members of the group. The process of media production in the school context seems to have facilitated, for the instances I have discussed at least, a further semi-paradox: *a collective sense of self*.

- *The group dynamic helped students formulate, imagine and carry out projects.*

There is a further argument in favour of group production: namely the ways in which it makes explicit the writing process and thereby assists the production process. This would seem to have direct pedagogic benefits. Again, this notion of *social writing* is qualitatively different from common attitudes towards print-writing. There writing is usually conceptualised in individual terms and taught as such. Indeed this model underpins the assessment of writing within the public examination system, despite the efforts of the process writing school to counter this approach.

- *Making media at school, seems to be pleasurable as an end in itself. It is a 'popular' activity.*

All the work described was produced at school and mainly for examination purposes. In this context at least, the subject Media Studies seems to have been perceived as a 'carnival-subject'. In particular, the media production component seems to have inspired an attitude of play and pleasure, usually at odds with the institutional discourses of schooling.

- *Reflective writing about media production is positive but can miss the point for some. It is only part of learning to be 'critical'.*

Whilst I would advocate a pedagogy in media education that stresses the need for reflection and meta-linguistic awareness, the process of writing accounts after media production activities is clearly only useful for some students. What is more, other kinds of reflection, both within the group process or teacher-led are often under-valued as a result of how Media Studies has developed as an academic subject. The element of translating

between language modes in moving from media to writing can be helpful; but this is a process that needs supporting and developing in its own right. Even the most academically able of the students discussed here (Emily, Clare, Emma) clearly benefited from being directed in this respect. Where reflection was not explicitly supported (Chapter Seven), the quality of the learning seems to have been impoverished.

- *Making media in school positions the students as such rather than replicating professional media production processes.*

The roles students adopt when making media are first and foremost as themselves, i.e. individual students in a particular social location. They do not see themselves as making 'real media' like professionals - even if invited to do so - and what they want from such work and read from others' work of this nature is constrained by the immediate environment. (If I am right here then the new vocational GNVQ's in Media, which have a curriculum exclusively based on imitating professional practice, would seem somewhat misplaced.)

- *Students need experience as producers as well as readers to be confident about working in new media.*

This observation relates back to the circle of creativity described in the preceding chapter. That model suggested that introducing students to work in new media necessarily created an obstacle for first time production. It is noticeable, that the projects described in Chapters Five and Six all allowed students to work in familiar forms, which I suspect affects the quality of both the products and students' learning. An obvious conclusion here is that students would benefit from the opportunity to repeat the experience of

media production throughout their school careers. At the same time research in this field needs to be longitudinal (see below).

[3] Further research questions

- *Why are some students 'better' than others at making media? How should successful competence in this area be defined?*

I suggested above that students who were more explicit and critical about their reading were the more adept producers. I would break this down further: that some students were able to make better use of conceptualising/planning stages than others, but that *during* the production this difference wasn't as noticeable. Equally it appeared as if students who don't imagine ahead can't make best use of time in post production. I did not set out to explore these issues but it is clear from the research described here that some differentiation can be observed. These 'hunches' point to the need for other kinds of research into the production process to be undertaken in order to investigate questions of 'ability' and differentiation. What might it mean to be able to say some students are better/different than others at media production? What criteria would be useful in answering this question? These questions might benefit from research explicitly focusing on single variables. In the wider field of literacy studies such research is notoriously difficult to come by.

- *What is the relationship between creative/making activities and reading/critical ones?*

I have suggested that the relationship between creative/making activities and reading/critical ones is not automatic. Whereas it can be seen that students bring their 'reading' (knowledge derived from consumption) to

making media, it is not clear how the reverse happens. The work undertaken in these studies did not explicitly address this issue. However, the relationship of critical learning to media production is far from simply causal. It cannot be concluded at this stage that simply making media is *the* means to make students more 'effective' readers. After all, as I have suggested above, the reverse may be true. Other kinds of research are needed to investigate this problem.

- *How might digital technologies change the nature of media production?*

Chapter Seven set out to explore what difference digital technologies might make to teaching and learning media production. I suggested there that they *can* bring media production 'physically' closer to students and give them direct control in a number of ways - perhaps as yet to be fully discovered. However, one classroom based case study is not sufficient evidence to draw any firm conclusions. For example, in line with the previous chapters, I might not expect students to be as proficient in digital multimedia until it was more available in domestic and other informal situations. At this stage I have a hunch that digital processes might make media production more self-reflexive; but again this should inform a future research agenda.

[4] Methodological implications

- *Teacher researchers are in a privileged position to give insight into the context and range of meanings within students' work.*

This finding supports the methodology of this research. Compared with work within the subcultures tradition, I suggest that my position as teacher-researcher enabled me to gain insight into students' work at a number of levels. A further implication here is that the school site is an interesting place

to investigate the production of youth culture. The semi-ethnographic role I occupied seemed to have facilitated considerable trust on the part of the students. At the same time it allowed me sufficient latitude to corroborate my understanding of what students learnt from the process. This would seem to be a profitable method for investigating students' learning.

- *Teacher readings of student work are substantially borne out by student accounts of their work.*

This second methodological observation supports the idea that although I have offered my reading of students' work as a primary mode of interpretation, support and triangulating evidence has come from a variety of sources. All accounts of learning are bound to be located in a privileged discourse; nevertheless many of the students' reflections about these projects share common ground with me in describing the meaning of their work.

Before discussing these findings in further detail, I want to indicate ways in which I might have re-designed, or at least inflected the direction of this research - had, of course, such retrospective understanding been available at the beginning of my study.

Limitations of the research

First of all I want to note that research of this kind is susceptible to alternative interpretations and potentially different conclusions. For example, some readers of *Plaz* have been solely concerned with the author's poor spelling and punctuation and argued that the role of the teacher should be to remediate this weakness. By the same token, my concern with his

world has been taken as a romantic over-investment in forms of resistant youth culture - in the same way as criticism has been made of the work of Paul Willis (see Buckingham 1993b). Clearly, the work described in these case studies was not carried out in average (by any description) classrooms. Again, my reading of *The Rude Boy Serial Killings* as a sophisticated, 'tactical' transgression of social boundaries and discourses has been criticised for its inner-city fashionableness. What, it might be asked, might white children in middle class areas produce - given the absence of equivalent semiotic resources to the classrooms I observed? Thirdly, there is the question of representativeness: in what ways might the very small scale of this research mitigate the kind of creative and cognitive claims I have made for it?

All of these objections are answerable: and indeed some of this ground is covered in the discussions within each of the case study chapters. Nevertheless, combined, it seems sensible to consider the adequacy of the data, in terms of its own representativeness, and whether other or different kinds of data are required to support the claims I am making. In particular, the extremely politicised nature of the discussion surrounding literacy makes any intervention like the present study highly contentious; so it is well to be clear about the differences between speculative and conclusive findings. Both sorts, it should be added, are perfectly proper to this kind of enquiry.

The qualitative data described here emerged over a four year period, yet it seems clear retrospectively that more evidence might have been collected within the main research school as well as outside it. In particular, the absence of a longitudinal study of individuals over a period of time means that an assessment of any one student's progression in *media writing* abilities is not discussed here. Secondly, a full and complete picture of the various forms of cultural production *outside* school should also be developed in order to complement and articulate with the patterns of school-based media production that emerge from this study. Thirdly, a more complete

picture of students' media consumption may help to reduce the level of speculation and inference in hypothesising about the reading histories of the young audience. And finally, comparative studies of other forms of writing in different environments would be helpful. Given the consistently low status of media education, it might have been interesting to compare students who derive social power through success in traditional 'academic' writing with the students in these case studies. Here it is possible to speculate that the absence of traditional forms of empowerment through conventional academic success may have led to the (sub) cultural arena being valued more by these students, than it might be by those in other sections of contemporary Britain.

At the same time this study raises questions about the role of the teacher-researcher. As an example of action research, whose main purpose is to change and improve on practice, these case studies do seem to fulfil the relevant criteria (see, for example, Carr and Kemmis 1986). Although the pattern of this research does not follow the strictly recursive programme advanced in the appropriate literature, it does reach some conclusions about the ways that media education classrooms might be organised and how tasks might be set and evaluated. Above all it indicates how the learning process might occur, and indeed may be supported and developed (see below). From this perspective the role of the teacher-researcher offers the best possible approach to meeting these aims in as much as it is only through close observation, the capacity to provide local knowledge and 'thick description' in the ethnographic tradition, which allows such analysis to take place.

However, it has proven difficult at times to combine the roles of teacher and audience researcher. Despite a strong critical presence in the relevant Cultural Studies literature recording a reflexive anxiety, (Walkerdine 1986, Ang 1989), it is generally accepted that audience research generates findings beyond the solipsistic interests of the researcher. Nevertheless, it could be argued that, as the teacher in these case studies, I was too

concerned to *justify* the activities of these young people at the expense of being objective about their understandings; although, it should be added, such objectivity may of course be impossible to achieve.

Ultimately all of these objections seem to be well founded. However, the purpose of this section is actually not to provide an absolute rebuttal in 'my defence'. As I indicated in Chapter Three, academic knowledge is often valued in terms of how it is *used* - a notion of particular relevance for the concept of literacy. Any idea that research provides pure answers in itself is no longer tenable. This is not to side-step any criticism of my work in an appeal to postmodern relativism, but to point out that if there is validity to my research, then it lies in my systematic analysis of instances of *media writing* and the role such analysis might play in any re-thinking of the nature of writing itself. This may in turn contribute towards a paradigm-shift in changing models of literacy. But it will only do so if my work here and comparable studies in this field can command strategic value in wider public debate.

The research questions

The research questions I discussed in Chapters One and Two can be substantially reduced to one main concern: is it helpful to conceptualise media production work in media education as a form of 'writing'? In turn this begs further questions: what theoretical gains (and losses) might be entailed in such a move? What model of literacy is needed to underpin it - particularly in considering the relation of reading to writing? Furthermore this research was undertaken with pedagogic aims. I wanted to suggest a new rationale for media production; to point towards new models of teaching and learning within the subject of Media Studies; and finally to discuss the implications of such work for a more inclusive notion of literacies. On the basis of my

research findings, I am now in a position to address these questions directly. This is not to say I can offer simple 'answers' to all of them - some are too ambitious for the scope of this study - but that I can conclude by indicating areas of future research in this field.

Reading and Writing

A central issue in all of the case studies has been to ascertain the relationship between *reading* and *writing*, or *consuming* and *making* media. How might *writing media* relate to students' prior experience and knowledge of media texts - knowledge and experience, drawn of course from informal and out-of-school contexts? And secondly how might the schooled practice of making media impact back upon the activity of reading - both within the home and/or in the formal reading activities of the curriculum? There are a number of ways of exploring this relationship, so a first conclusion here is that it is not helpful to think of single explanations. This is in keeping with models of literacy discussed in Chapter Two (e.g. Heath 1983), which stress the plural nature of situated literacy practices.

The case studies have shown students using knowledge and competencies derived from their reading at a number of levels. Thus, the narrative structures in *Plaz*, the codes and conventions of the photo-stories, knowledge of the practice of reading women's magazines in Chapter Six, even the fan reading of *The Outsiders* in Chapter Seven, all suggest that students of varying abilities can and do draw from these out-of-school *resources*. These resources range from 'lower level' knowledge about encoding to 'higher level' understanding of the socio-politics of genres.

The students in these case studies have also drawn on these resources with varying degrees of reflexivity: that is to say, an awareness that they *know* they are using a particular kind of *knowledge* - a process best exemplified by my discussion of meta-linguistic understanding. Thus Emily or

Emma seem to have found in the experience of making media an opportunity to draw upon explicit 'grammatical' knowledge; whilst for others, the knowledge has been no less grammatical, but has not been made so explicit to external readers (like myself). An example here might be the use of hip-hop graffiti in *The Rude Boy Serial Killings*. The authors never commented (to me) on their appropriation of this style within their hybridised 'film': although using the style in this way demonstrates an understanding of the pertinent codes and conventions.

However, I am suggesting that being able to use 'passive' knowledge in media production is *inevitably* a reflexive, if not a self-consciousness process; in that the act of using the forms, codes and conventions derived from reading in the process of production necessarily involves a level of awareness beyond that afforded by the normal reading process. Requiring further evidence of this transformation in the form of explicit critical discourse may, however, be an unreasonable expectation: it is not, after all, generally required as evidence of competence in print-writing; although if it were to be, 'learning to write' might become a more 'empowering' experience. I have already indicated that further research enquiring into the effects of writing upon reading needs to be undertaken - that is, looking at analytical readings by the same students who have undertaken media productions. My hypothesis here is that if some kind of transformation during the writing process has taken place, and if it is supported and recognised by the teacher, then it will develop a student's critical or analytical reading. What is more I would suggest that it may only be through media production that certain kinds of development may occur, in the same way as Richmond's (1990) model of the development of knowledge about language places a central emphasis on transferring competence across domains - reading in print cannot progress beyond a certain level unless one writes as well.

I would make one important reservation here. The models of literacy I am using (see Chapter Two) all stress the experiential nature of such

practices. They indicate that literacy is a social practice grounded in specific social contexts. From this point of view we have to ask if the 'literacy' practice of media education can affect the practice of media consumption, (i.e. reading) in the home. The cultural differences between these institutional sites may be more of a barrier than in the case of print literacy. (Of course it is frequently argued (e.g. Bernstein 1971) that the 'barrier' between home and school is more permeable for some social groups than others, but to date nobody has investigated this notion from the reverse perspective - that is, what happens if we try to validate media consumption in the home as a literacy practice.) However, the question to ask here is whether learning to *write media* at school can change media consumption in the home. Again other kinds of research are necessary here; but until literacy studies investigate the holistic range of young people's experiences in this respect, this question will remain un-answered.

For example, we might try to identify the stage at which students' transfer competencies across *literacy domains* as well as across *literacy practices*. In other words, if a student has learnt to be a critical reader in print (through learning how language works in the process of becoming a writer), then can the reflexive knowledge that student possesses be 'naturally' transferred across literacy domains - to, say, moving image media - or does it need new and specific support in order to be applied to the second domain? Do students at the stage studied here enter a level of transferable meta-level knowledge which exceeds grounded experience of literacy events? If this is the case then I would cautiously suggest that making media is beneficial to students' competence in the domain of print literacy precisely because it accelerates this process of linguistic meta-awareness. For example, I would have liked to investigate what happened to Emily's developing conceptualisation of grammar in print after her experiences in media production. If my hunches are correct then I would suspect that in

transferring her knowledge to a new domain, it would help her to apply generalised knowledge elsewhere.

From this perspective (see below) I would argue that media education might play a more central role in literacy education in general, rather than being simply restricted to its traditional aim, described in Chapter One, of making students 'critical' consumers of media products.

Genre and technology

Perhaps the most recurrent theme in all the case studies is that of genre. For example, in analysing how students synthesise genres, or commenting on how students imitate existing genres, this concept has underpinned my analysis of students' work. I suspect part of this emphasis was due to my interest, outlined in Chapter Two, in the work of the Genre theorists in English, and therefore in the pedagogic functions of genre in teaching about writing. However, I would also suggest that the data prioritised the role of genre in several ways. It questioned what might be the precise role of genre in 'media writing'. Is it, by implication, more or less significant here than in traditional forms of writing? I also want to ask what precisely I might mean by genre-writing? In particular the role of 'rules' within genres needs to be investigated in more detail.

At face value it might seem as if media production encourages students to make use of more popular and public genres than in other kinds of schoolwork. Whereas writing in English, especially for assessment purposes, frequently encourages students to employ school-based genres - the 'story', the 'essay' - this may not be the case in media education. From this point of view, media production may seem slightly more 'transparent' to students than work in English, as it is generally clear from their prior reading of media texts what it is they are invited to make. A part of the problem identified by Genre theorists (e.g. Cope and Kalantzis 1993) is that the genres

in which students work at school are not shared in the home or made as easily available to students.

My case studies also suggest that students may well have invested in genres to a considerable degree *before* they engage in media production at school. *Pony's* search for a masculine identity, the eponymous *Rude Boys*, and the authors of *Slutmo* are all bringing to their work a considerable amount of time, knowledge and commitment to genres, because it is through these forms of popular culture that they have found a meaningful articulation of their concerns with identity; especially, this data suggests, in terms of gender and ethnicity. The genres of popular culture are already meaningful to the students and the media work described in the preceding chapters seems to have keyed into this straight away.

On one level this investment seems to have had the effect of making students aware of the formal attributes of genre. Because the distinctions between, say, *Marvel* comics and *Batman* are important to *Pony*, he has a kind of 'critical' knowledge he can apply to the production of media texts. But can I generalise from this? If students are avid readers of popular genres, does it follow that this 'fan' knowledge gives them an advantage as writers? Does intensive consumption of media texts develop linguistic knowledge in and of itself without any pedagogic support? Overall, for example, my case studies show a lax attitude towards the implementation of generic rules. On the one hand this is due to (my) teaching. The students were not invited to replicate published genres; and again, comparing teaching of that sort with the kind of work I did, is an area for further research.

On the other hand I have argued that the students synthesised genres because of the combination of circumstances they found themselves in as media producers. Here I would argue that media work, analysed in its context, encourages students to play with generic rules - almost self consciously, because authors know that their audience actually knows what is expected as well. The fact that media work is made for and by a

'community of readers' (see below) allows for a more explicit level of rule breaking, in the same way as speakers might use slang in their peer groups while avoiding it in encounters with official discourses.

Finally, in respect to genre, I have suggested that the foregrounded use of genre in much media work allows for, and indeed encourages, students to *think of themselves* in generic terms. Because the conventions of genres can be used as a kind of shorthand - for example, we all know what *Cosmopolitan* stands for - they seem to have allowed the writers to both invest in and distance themselves from the work at the same time. Students seem to have used this work as an opportunity to 'explore' and 'experiment' with notions of themselves in unexpected ways, beyond the apparent requirements of the units of work. *Slutmo* for example, seems to have offered its authors individuated routes to explore their own feminine identities at the same time as locating those identities within the broader social process of gendering.

Indeed this tension in genre work, between the pre-given and the ability to make it anew, is directly paralleled by my attention to the determining influence of media technologies. I suggested, particularly in the last chapter, that there is a circular relationship between what comes from the outside - the eternal, pre-existing, cultural or technological means of communication - and the individual control authors can exert over such material. Leaving aside the collaborative dimension to media production, and the more social senses of self involved here (see below), I am suggesting that working with media technologies in popular genres establishes a fruitful tension. In Chapter One I described how this tension has been described in terms of oppositions: between the social and the individual; and between structure and agency.

Although I have argued that many of the pieces these students produced are highly individual, and at times idiosyncratic, I have always emphasised how the self is socially produced by and for a contemporary context. Whether it be talking to *Pony* in an interview situation, or analysing

Slutmo, I have tried to demonstrate a 'social constructivist' model of identity (Shotter 1993), showing how the students have 'made themselves' in each context. In this respect, I would not seek to 'resolve' any tension between structure and agency, but rather argue that it is out of such a tension that individuals may come to produce themselves. What is more, this inbuilt tension between genres and the individual author in media production already establishes fertile grounds for such work. Such a model of writing is inviting students to locate themselves against and within the pre-given meanings already defined by genres. Making a women's magazine, like *Slutmo*, defines its authors by what they are and what they are not, as well as what they want to be seen to be: the genre carves out spaces of identity. It is not a question of which comes first, self or society, but more how both work in tandem with each other.

Writing: Level, Audience and Meta-Language

In Chapter Two I drew attention to the fact that discussion about print-writing takes place at a number of different levels. These have been characterised as 'higher' and 'lower order' or 'top down' and 'bottom up'. I made the case that theorising media production as a kind of writing was difficult precisely because there was no single model against which media-writing might be mapped. The research I carried out was with students who were (at both high and low levels) competent writers of media - and in general, of print. In that sense I do not have data from beginning writers (i.e. younger media producers) to parallel the kind of research discussed in Kress (1994). The research projects I set up and recorded did not, with the exception of Chapter Seven, produce material which gives sustained insight into the micro-processes of writing. Again this is an opportunity for further research.

As all the students I discuss were competent and (in some cases) sophisticated writers of print, this also means that a significant amount of

primary orientation undertaken by all beginning writers was already in place for these authors. They already knew the basic rules or functions learnt from early knowledge of texts and previous print-writing experiences (Meek 1988: Kress 1994): that writers write in order to communicate with an audience; that genres have specific audiences; and so on. From this point of view I would again stress that media production may be seen as more akin to working in a second language. Indeed, work on teaching bilingual writers (e.g. Richmond *et al* n.d.) frequently stresses the explicit value of the direct teaching of genre because, it is argued, students already have enough meta-linguistic knowledge to make sense of such direct instruction. Conceptualising media writing as a kind of 'secondary literacy', then, supports my observation above that reading experience and generic knowledge give students a framework around which they can develop their writing skills.

This is not to say that there is no place for an attention to the equivalent of lower order skills - for example letter formation - in a consideration of media writing: but it is clear that my study, conducted with older students already versatile in a complex literacy-culture, can really only make claims about learning to write at quite a high level. Indeed, it seems clear that this study's examination of literacies is pertinent at a rather specialised level of literacy acquisition. The stage of literacy use observed in these studies is peculiar to the social position in which young people engaged in media education courses in schools might find themselves. They are institutionalised as dependent learners, yet demonstrate here a level of independence. Again, further research exploring work by younger students might help focus this issue more closely. What I can deduce from my research is that media production may be important in developing higher order levels of (media) literacy competence. Such high level literacy requires detailed attention to and knowledge of, lower order skills, but many of the pre-conditions for effective media-writing are already in place for these students.

Whatever notion of readers or audiences are in operation across these case studies, I am fundamentally arguing that the *primary* literacy of print has already established the pre-conditions for the development of secondary literacies. In particular I would argue that the concept of an audience and of the role of meta-language are already functioning for these media-writers - even though I am suggesting that the media production further develops these ideas. A basic concept of audience - in the sense that it provides an orientation for a text - is already in place for these writers. At the same time there remains a need to question further the whole metaphor of *audience* - a term implying live reception of an aural performance. Is a singular notion of the audience (as in a 'reader') appropriate for media-writing of this kind? It seems to me that the work described here shows 'authors' working with notions of multiple audiences, real and imaginary, sometimes conflating teacher, peer and ideal readers. In particular I think the notion of the 'community of readers' derived from Fish's (1980) 'interpretative communities' seems pertinent here. This suggests that the socially enclosed world of the peer culture in a school community provides a delimited culture in which specialised meanings may circulate, such as a certain individual's reputation, or assumptions about the 'silliness' of women's magazines (see Chapters Five and Seven respectively). This notion extends the more restricted range of readers described in classic studies on writing, discussed in Chapter Two.

A further example of these pre-conditions might be the role of meta-language, which again I would argue *already makes sense to the writer* as a concept - even if it is only during the process of media writing that it comes into play. Thus, the preceding studies raise a number of questions about meta-language, some of which I have already discussed in this chapter. For example, I have suggested above that the more effective media writers seem to be able to reflect in an abstract way on the processes of meaning making. I have not proved the reverse, that one cannot be an effective writer without

access to this meta-level, because of the methodological problem of equating meta-language (discourse) with self-consciousness (thought). However, I have suggested at the least, that a level of reflexive awareness operates even if self-conscious control of a meta-language is not visible. Nevertheless, underpinning this discussion is the fact that these writers are at the level when they can move between literacy modes; and this feature of these students' work makes it difficult to comment on genre theorists' claims that acquiring a meta-language gives writers a control over language in general (Cope and Kalantzis 1993). In other words, this may be true or not, but I have not been able to isolate the variable of meta-language (developed purely through media writing) from other factors affecting the literacy practices I describe. I can only suggest here that these writers already seemed to be operating at a sufficiently advanced level to conceptualise and make use of meta-languages in ways that helped their media writing. For example, they have already been exposed to first and second language work in (and in some cases, outside) schools, so it may be more useful to work with a less schooled and younger age group to investigate this feature further.

From Media Learning to Media Teaching

Chapters One and Two developed an explicit dialogue between the subjects of Media Studies and English. To an extent I have continued this dialogue throughout the thesis as I have concentrated on defining the role of *writing* in media education. However, this dialogue has also been taking place at a pedagogic level. This leaves us with a series of questions about the differences and similarities between the models of teaching writing in English and those which might inform the teaching of media production in media education.

Answering these questions is difficult, not least for the reasons observed in Chapter Two and above, that there are no single 'methods'

employed in either subject, nor is there any one simple media language within which all 'writers' might work. Equally the problems of level, identified above, make it difficult to generalise about the teaching of writing because it is clear that much work in English is directed towards writers working at different levels from those I observed; and once students can write in one language it is not the same to begin that process in another.

Nevertheless there are some important differences which have emerged from this limited research. First I would note the different role of the peer audience and the teacher. I would argue that the work I describe in this research meets the criteria of 'writing for real', as idealised by the process school, because the conditions of production and circulation are *credibly simulated* for the student. In other words the ideal of students writing for students - thereby reducing the emphasis on 'teacher as examiner' - seems to have been realised in much of the work I describe, albeit for a range of reasons. The challenges here are to work out either whether media production is *inherently* inclined to work in this way; or, whether media production is *more likely* to work in this way than print-writing. However, only a more direct comparison of students' 'writing' in both subjects could throw light onto this. Is 'writing for real' easier in a media classroom because media production lends itself more directly to a workshop style - *a pedagogic explanation*: or is it on account of the subject content - that working in the forms of popular culture enables a more 'natural' exchange between writer and reader in the context of a peer audience - *a cultural explanation*?

Secondly I want to return to a discussion of the role of meta-linguistic knowledge and reflection in media work. I would suggest that the requirement to reflect systematically on media production both in the retrospective 'log' or diary, and as a condition of the group production, is a method peculiar to media which should be considered in English. Of course, there are significant problems with the requirement to produce logs (discussed in Chapter Six) and they should not be discounted lightly. Yet students are rarely asked to reflect

analytically on their writing in English; and yet my research suggests that it may be beneficial for them to do so. Equally, I have suggested that the imposition of a task which utilises prior knowledge (derived from consumption) in the group situation forces an explicit consideration of linguistic and meta-linguistic issues for the students. It might be possible to encourage more explicit comparisons here, e.g. getting Emily to consider the role of speech marks in relation to speech bubbles. Again I am suggesting that the process of making media and the fact that students are working in 'their' culture makes this dimension much more open to them. In other words it might help students' writing in print if they developed meta-linguistic understanding through *writing in other languages*.

This is not to say that I am arguing that the methods of teaching media production in media education have arisen solely for pedagogic purposes. Far from it. Indeed, in Chapter Six, I suggested that the requirement to produce written reflections actually arises out of an anxiety that media work is not rigorous enough on its own; and a snobbery that working in non-print media is not intellectual unless supported by the abstraction of writing.

On the other hand I argued in Chapter Two, that a central problem in an analogy between media production and writing is that it cannot accommodate the relationship between thought and speech as part of the metaphor. Indeed, the more I suggest that media work is operating as a second language, the further I move away from the direct analogy of *media literacy*. However, my attention to the details of making meaning in media draws strongly on the principle that literacy is a 'situated practice' - which is why I have tried to explicate the full range of social factors affecting the writing process in these case studies. I am therefore setting aside arguments that writing privileges the development of thought - that it has a special role in the development of cognitive processes - in favour of an emphasis on viewing writing as important in the exploration of *social identities*. From this

perspective, learning to *write media* becomes a question of how to function in specific social circumstances; but of itself this does not suggest any theoretical distinction between learning to write in print or in other media forms.

Finally here, I want to return to the opposition between the genre and process schools of writing from a pedagogic perspective. Whereas my discussion of media production as a form of writing has been able to draw from both perspectives, the pedagogic stand off between the two approaches is much less amenable to selective appropriation. This is partially, as I have noted in Chapters One and Two, because both schools have become associated with a crude polarisation between progressivism and traditionalism, in line with the acrimony of much educational debate (Phillips 1996).

I have suggested at a number of points that direct instruction may be helpful and appropriate. Equally I have suggested that the workshop model of the process classroom is suitable for media production. I have argued that spaces for reflection need to be integrated into the production activity and I would also suggest that such a process would need to be supported and taught to; it is not, as I suggested in Chapters Six and Seven, a naturally occurring activity. My emphasis on school and students' cultures is process oriented; the attention to structure and convention, genre directed. At times I have tried to offer a model of writing that starts from a process concern with self but ends up with a very different, post-structuralist notion of social identity. All in all, I have suggested a number of ways in which the pedagogic models implicit in both schools would benefit from a *dialogic* synthesis: that neither model of writing need root its practice in simply progressive or traditional methods of teaching and learning. There is a place for instruction, imitation and formal academic discourse within the context of student centred work. Balancing the full range of the students' cultural knowledge with the teachers needs to take place in a recursive and open minded fashion.

I would also agree that some of the teaching methods I have used would be of equal use in an English classroom, just as conceptualising making media as a kind of writing has drawn from work in English. Focusing on genre, audience, and reflection may be equally appropriate in both subjects and students should be given the opportunity to work across these literacy domains in order to develop competence in either or both.

Towards a Social Theory of Writing

I have hinted throughout this study that it might be helpful to conceptualise media production in terms of a social theory of writing. At times I have also referred to a social theory of creativity, by which I mean thinking of students' work not in terms of a Romantic individualism (Kearney 1988), but as socially produced, circulated and received. In other words, underpinning much of my discussion has been an attempt to move away from the notion of the writer defined in terms of individual competence towards conceptualising young writers within their culture - that is, both their media- culture and their school-culture.

In part I have used this idea as a kind of shorthand to refer to the collaborative nature of group media production and also to accommodate my attention to questions of gender and ethnicity which the data - or at least my reading of them - raise so acutely. This is not to say that other dimensions of social power (class and age) are less significant, simply that they have not come to the forefront of students' work in quite the same way in this study. However, if as I suggested above, we need to think of all writing in these terms, as socially defined, then what might be extraordinarily 'social' about media production?

First of all, I would identify the peer audience in relation to media work as being central to the ways these students imagine, carry out, and analyse their work. And secondly I would point to the ways that the audience fulfilled

the immediate aspirations of authors' work. Whereas students know they learn to write (in print) in order to develop competence for real practice in their adult futures, the work I describe here seems to have been oriented more towards the students' present. This attention to the concrete materialities of school life is also a product of the research process and my role as teacher-researcher. However, my argument that the work is produced for and out of these circumstances, is also inflected to draw attention to the school culture. This contrasts it with the traditional Romantic view of writing being solely the result of individual agency, of the mind operating alone.

This is not to say that there have not been criticisms of this model within all mother tongue language teaching, especially English (e.g. Moss 1989). A part of the genre movement is equally slanted for these reasons. However, a social theory of writing is needed in both the subjects of English and Media Studies not merely as an antidote to a shared Romantic heritage, but because the *writing* described in this study only makes sense if it is seen in these terms. Furthermore, drawing attention to the social is productive in pedagogic terms. It suggests strategies for organising the classroom, displaying students' work, assisting the group process and creating appropriate spaces for reflection. It also impacts back upon my attempt to theorise the writing process because it suggests how individuals might transform their consumption through production - their reading through writing. Viewed in this light media production may yet encourage students and teachers alike to think of the writing process as inherently social. This again may help define a new practice of literacies education, where there is less attention to the skill of the individual and more paid to the reading of the whole group; where the concrete reality of students' lives may contribute towards the content of the curriculum; and where self expression is less a question of transcendent individualism but more a question of participating in the shared culture of the school.

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Appendix 1

(Spelling and lay out have been reproduced as faithfully as possible).

Plaz Investigations

The Begining

~~The Choice~~

It all began one day when Plaz Hunter was going to school on his dirt bike when he was suddenly stopped by a rather attractive brewnet. "You've got to help me...Their after me she said pointing at a few black merc's and B.M.W.'s.

"Get on then" Plaz said handing her a spare helmet.

She got on and thy rode away. Plaz took a short cup through a park wher the cars could not go.

Plaz had no intention of not going to school just because up a hichiker who was obvisuly in some sort of trouble with a form of othoroty. He stopped in the school car park and got off. The girl got off and gave the helmet to Plaz, Plaz took his helmet off as well.

"Thank you , you..you don't know what you've just done" she said

"Good bye" Plaz said shaking her hand

"Wait. You've got to" Plaz beggan runing.

Plaz got to his regisrcation classs just on time, he sat down and started talking to his class mates when he herd a voice from behind

"I've got to talk to you the hichiker said.

"Well I don't want want to listen" Plaz said angrily

I need your help I'm looking for"

"I don't care. look I gave you a lift that's all it doesn't mean I'm your friend your gardian or what ever, O.K."

The girl left the class.

a few weeks minets later two blokes walk into the class and grab Plaz and took him out side, they pushed him into a van where supprisngly enough ther was the girl.

"Oh no can't I get rid of you" Plaz said

The door closed and the van began to move.

"My name's sammantha ly layne" she said

'what makes you think I care?" Plaz said

"You don't like me do you?" sam said

" now what makes you think that? I enjoy enjoy being stopped in the middle of the road by a ferm of some sort then being kidnaped by probobly the same ferm and all

because of that girl I picked up'. Plaz said " well, I enjoy stopping total strangers and asking them to help me, anyway if you'd helped me when I asked you then they probably wouldn't of cort me ~~of~~ or you ~~sam~~

"So you'er blaming me for this are you!"

"listen, me and my friend Danual came here from the future 7026 yrs in the future, wait let me finnish. In our time we that is earth found this crystal which opens doors through time when you pas an electrial current through it, we accidentally came here snd now ~~we~~ these people I think they call them selfeas the lbf"

"I think that F.B.I." plaz said.

"Anyway this F.B.I. wants us ~~wh~~ to open a door way to our time so they can come through".

"so how did they find out about you being from the future?"

"I think it was when we came through to one of their air bases and we through a tank ~~and~~ at their building with ~~our~~ these" sam said shewing Plaz her wrist which had some sort of fancy watch

"with this you can do~~n~~ almost anything"

The van stopped & four men took plaz and sam out and took them into a room with no windows just a door and a miror on one wall.

"Don't talk so freely they'e probably got the place bugged and that mirror is probobly one way". Plaz ~~said~~ whispared to sam

"Now listen to us 'we'er not going to hurt you we just want a few weapons from you're time and then you can go on with your lives" said a voice

"And what if we don't do what you want" ask Plaz

"Then you're friend and you dies'

just then a wall began to move and behind it was a Danual sam's friend from her time, he was hanging from the wall, he was unconsisue.

Sam got very angry and she pressed a few buttons on her wrist thingy and pointyd it at Danual. Danual began to rise and chans holding him up ~~bre~~ became undane and the glass broke Danual came through and sam put him down She then blew a hole in the walk

"pick him up and follow me " sam said to Plaz. Plaz put Danual over his shodar and ran behind Sam closly followed by about 10-15 agents with Uzis Sam jumped into a BMW and it started by its self. Plaz put Danual in the back and jumped in then the agents atarted to fire at them but sam deflected the bulets.

! After a bit of time

"You know all my life I wanted some escitment but I never thought I'd ever get any but now look at this in one day I've had more excitment then I've ever had in the

15yrs I've been alive".

What's it like where you come from?

"Well, theres more crime than ever and there's police agencys as well as the normal police you can now hire a cop, we don't have cars just hovers crafts but with these you can fly realy high, almost everyone has one of those energy cuts for pretetion"

"Can you travel through space?"

"~~Ove~~ ofcourse you can but space is such a big place ~~but have~~ we've found afew friendly solar systems".

~~just someone start~~

"Now You know Plaz Hunters not my real name its just one I invented. my ~~me~~ own name was like boring so I invented Plaz, He started off to be a charter in a story I was writing but ~~te~~ I got atached to the name and charter."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"I don't know . I supose its because I'll proboly never see you again"

A helicopter came up from ~~the~~ behind them then a few car. they turned into road by the guidance of Plaz. sam ~~can~~ ~~conjured~~ conjured up an invisable wall to by them a bit of time. sam got ~~ef~~ out and so did plaz carying Danual who was just waking up. Sam began to open the door back to her time.

"Come with us Plaz"

"I don't know"

"Well look. if you stay here they'll proboly haund you for ever.

Plaz looked at the cars & helicopters trying to penertrait the wall then he loked at the door where sam was waiting for his choice.

Plaz had to hurry.

Six months later 8963 ad.

I Phone rings in an office on the sleezy side of town a guy sitting looking out off his window picks it up

"Hello Plaz Investigations. Plaz Hunter- Speeking. You want me to find your ex-partner who went to the dagerba system hm , Hold on while I look through my diary". He puts his hand over the mouth pice " What do you think sam, should I take it?"

"its up to you Plaz, its up to you"

by

Ponyboy

Curtis

~~chapter one~~

The wrong case

It has been one year since Plaz Hunter came to this time. (8963 ad) Plaz has become a private investigator and he owns a craft a set of guns which consist of an normal handgun which never leaves Plaz's side two daggers which are always at the sides of his boots a fusion canon and one puls rifle with an under carriage pump attachment grenade launcher and he's only 15 years old. , Plaz is also a 8th level black belt at 12 different martial arts such as karate, Te quan do, Ninjitsu and tichee. Plaz has to deal with the most dangerous ~~per~~ kind of people like police don't have to deal with like gangs such as the mafia but in this time the mafia does not exist but we do have gangs much more dangerous like THE KOO - VAKS MOB, The NOMEAGO and The ~~Empire~~ Force

Plaz sometimes is called on to do some bounty - hunting but he prefers the term free lance peace keeping agent which ~~with~~ is what his favourite comic book character Deaths Head from his time, he is very rarely called on to do this .

The case I'm about to tell you about is one of those cases its I think one Plaz will never forget. He called this the wrong-case.

Plaz was sitting in his office he only had two case to choose from one was a wife spying on her husband and the other was a wife was searching for her husband, but these were the kinda cases Plaz hates but that was all. Then the phone rings and Plaz answers it

"hello Plaz Investigations. Plaz Hunter speaking"

"No don't have any good case do you? If you want a good case then go and meet us at the old warehouse off Dragon's point".

The person hang up. It left Plaz thinking. He decided to go, But when he got there it didn't look right, there was alarms everywhere but Plaz got past all of them, then inside there ~~was~~ were all sorts of booby-traps but again Plaz got past them then he got to a little hut. Plaz walked towards it then someone invited him in, as he pulled out his gun he walked inside. There was a table in the middle of the hut at the

table was 3 men and on either side of them were two well armed guards.

"hello, You must been Plaz Hunter the Best Private Investigator this side of the Meteorsystem" The middle guy said

"Thats right who are you guys"

~~"I won't you to I'm Inspector torn and this~~

"I'm chief Inspector Thorn and this is Detective Inspector Dysan and this is Inspector Martin, we are all from the I.E.A. (law Enforcement Agents (new F.B.I.)) We want you to go after and kill the leader of the ~~Nomego~~ Nomeago gang"

"Why? Why don't you do it yourself?"

"Think about it Plaz"

"Oh yeh your the athoritis aren't you and because its murder it would make you lot look bad"

"No .No. Not murder, Questor has ~~comited a lot of crimeshe~~ murdered more inocent people then you could ever imagin, so you see you'll be doing everyone a favour"

"Well O.K.but your going have to pay me half in advance"

"O.K.\$5,000 isn't it?"

"\$25,000"

"What! \$500,000 for just a"

" Murder, and because its you lot then the price goes up"

"O.K. We'll pay....This time"

Plaz took the money and before he left

"If you knew I was comming then way lay out al these traps"

"Well Plaz , i figured that if your as good as your repuation is then only you could get pasted al of them"

"And what if ye I didn't get past one"

" Then we'd of found someone ~~oas~~ els".

"Thanks a lot"

Plaz returned to his office to think about what he'd done. When Sam walked inside

"What's hapening Plaz?"

"I think I've gone crazy, I that is me have just taken a case which not even Death's head would've taken"

"Why? What've you done?"

"I'vem going to take on th NOMEAGOS"

"You jerk,Why? ha WHY?"

Why What?"

"Why are you always trying to be that stupid comic book character Deaths head, Youll never be him you will always be Plaz Hunter no one els"

"look maybe I'm not lik you, I need something to keep me going.o.k. I know I'll probobly never be Deaths head but if I die tomorrow then at least I'll die Knowing I tryed to be someone o.k."

Plaz picks up his weapons and walks out leaving sam very pissed off".

Plaz put out the word that he was looking for Questor, and in now time at alll theNOMEAGOS found him ow Plaz isn't the kind of per son it would be wise to kidnap espetialy well this somebody is on Plaz's hit list.

Plaz decided to let them take him to their base which was like a great big space station.

Plaz disposed of the kidnapers ~~and~~ after geting into the base. He walk on for aa bit and came across two gaurds. Now if he used his gun then that would probobly set of some sort of alarm and he ws dead. So he knifed both gaurds and proceded ~~int~~ deeper into the base, but something was wrong. Now has been doing this fso long he's sort of lernt how to smell trouble some jobs smell good and some smell ~~b~~ bad now this one stank like the gamorean slim pits in sector 8 in mid-summer, so far everything was too easy the only explation Plaz could find was that it was all a trap but its was all too late Plaz had walked strait into it he was surrounded

"so Thorn though you could kill me hu"

A great big guy said obveusly the leader Questor he had a scare on the right side of his face and a silver glove with spikes on the left hand ~~on~~ his left stood a great big 6ft s cyborg who had muccel on his mucscl and sword on his back and two miny rockets on his left cuf. and a double barrol lazer gun on the ~~right~~ other.

Plaz didn't know what to do fight of run, so he done both, he pulled out hand gun and shot s five guards he couldn't shoot Quesor because the cybrog stepped in the way. Plaz then picked up his fusion canon and blew a hole ~~along~~ in the wall along with a few guards. Plaz then began t run but theycyborg shot one of his rockets at p Plaz and blew Plaz's left arm up to the shoulder off, now plaz had to get some medical help but he doesn't like hospitals, in the end he had now choice.

At the hospital they replacd Plaz's arm with a robot arm which has a built in ardour cuff a compter, weapons system and also anything Plaz could ever need and more.

The next day sam came to see Plaz at the office.

'so what happened?..You didn't kill him did you?" Sam said

"No I didn't, lookssss like Thorn forgote to tell me that Questor has got a ~~cyborg~~ b ninje-cyborg bodyguard who yesterday ~~blew~~ gave me this' Plaz put his new robot arm on the table

"Oh my god, what, what happened?"

"Quester's bodyguard thats! what happened, he blew my arm clean off"

"You lost your arm and your ~~probably~~ still going after him right"

"Well, I'm not going after him just yet, I'm going to train a little befor I do anything als".

Plaz spend one month training, practicingwith his new arm and also practice his draw.

One month latr Plaz thought he was ready to take on the Nomeagos.

He got some new weapons and a new car. He got a new a hand gun which has got 5 different ~~laz~~ shots, 1 Freez shot, 2 Disintergrate shot, 3 stun shot, 4 Normal shot, 5 multipul the gun also has a silencer built in.

He is now ready to take them on.

Plaz put the word about that he was looking for The NOMEAGOS.

Soon everyone knew he was after the NOMEAGOS, Plaz was sitting in a bar where he was drinking a ~~cock~~ cola when suddenly two big guys wharing rain coats. Now if someone was wharing a raincoat in the middle of summer you'd think them crazy so these two walked directozly to Plaz. Plaz knew what they wanted but he dicided to play along with ~~m~~ them.

" Are you Plaz Hunter the guy who's looking for Questar?"

"That's right, you guys know where I can find him/"

"Yeh right here" one of them said pulling out a gun.

Before anyone had a chance ~~the~~ to duck or run Plaz had shot both of them dead.

Plaz serched them And found two guns. Plaz jumped on his craft. he drove to his office and started to scan everthing with his arm, he lowkated the NOMEAGOS~~hid~~ ship, he drove there and waitd a few yards away and hid behind ~~be an~~ bush and got his arm to jam any scaner then when night fell ~~and when~~ he made his move.

He walked toward ~~his~~ the ship very discetely and disposed of two guards and got in through a ventelation shaft and using his ninja skills he made his way to the generator.

he eventually got there leaving a line of bodyies behind, once he got there, he walk around carefully plcing high explosives. then he walked back to the ~~ventilation shaft and~~ main chamber wher he was going to obtain some weapons.

But as he was killing one of the guards Just before he died he managed to sound

the alarm, so Plaz had to get out, he dived into a ventilation shaft and made his way out

once he was out he ran to his craft. Standing in front of the craft was the Questar's cyborg bodyguard. Plaz pulled out the detonator for the explosives he placed and blew the NOMAGOS ship sky high. now Plaz thought if Questar dies the bodyguard would be deactivated by he was wrong.

"You probably thought I would die along with Questar but you see when I was being built Questar gave me a mind of my own which is activated when Questar is dead and the last command I must carry out before I have my own life I must KILL whoever killed Questar, and that person is you" The cyborg said walking closer to Plaz.

Plaz knew he had to think fast so without thinking about it his arm produced a metal glove for his right hand to wear.

Plaz picked up his fusion cannon and shot the cyborg straight in the chest, but it only slowed him down.

Plaz noticed a few boxes of high explosives a few yards away from where the ship used to be obviously some extra stock for Questar's next job. Plaz thought if he could get the cyborg there he could blow him up, but the cyborg threw one punch at Plaz's face and Plaz flew about 10-15 meters away, as Plaz was trying to get up the cyborg kicked him in the ribs. Plaz pulled out his gun built up all the power his arm could get into his fist and threw one punch at the cyborg's face which made him fly then Plaz threw another one, then while he was recovering Plaz picked up and threw him at the boxes of explosives and then he shot one laser bolt at one box and blew that cyborg into nothing.

Plaz later met Thorn and collected the rest of his money.

Plaz sat in his office for a few minutes before phoning Sam to apologise and invited her for dinner.

Plaz was sitting in his office counting the money he got from the Questar case when Sam walked in.

"I hear you whipped out the NOMEAGOS, and now I hear your after the force and Quoovaks Quoovaks mob both together." Sam said

"yeh so what?"

"Are you crazy? going after the Nomeagos was one thing but the force & the Quoovaks mob is...its just suicide"

"I done abit of research on the three gangs, it seems that a few years ago there was a macive gang called the flaming fists who prcticaly ruld a small solar system called Ttyson, all theyahd to do was whipe out a small group of police, the fists thought the group would be nothing but they were wrong, the group whiped out the main battle ship of the fists and then while they were recovering thegroup called the space police who when they came drove the fists out of the tysan system, the fists later on slit up into three seperate gangs who suprisingly enough were calld the NOMEAGOS the force and the Quoovaks mob, so you see if a contract goes out one of them then it goes out on all of them, and you know the first rule of a bounty Hunter ~~always never turn down a~~ always forfill a contract no matter what"

"look I know you like Deaths head alot but you will never be him, he's a comic book charter this the real world you can't take on both of them at the same time".

"I'm going to and if you want you can help"

"NO! thanks" with that Sam alked out

"SAM I NEED YOUR HELP!"

Just then Thorn walked in.

"I want you to do me another favour" Thorn said putting a breif case on Plaz's desk.

"look Thorn I only doen that job because business wasn't going that well not as a favour O.K.ay"

"Anyway I want you to take out the Quoovaks mob and the force they've teamed up and we know their working on something big we just don't know what"

"So what do you want me for?"

"We want you to find out what their doing and stop them no matter what....we'll give you 1/2 million now and 1/2 when its finished.

Plaz excepted, he just made 1 million without doing anything he was going to kill them for nothing but then came Thorn.

Plaz had been following one of the members of the gang for a week and traced the gang to an under ~~grown~~ ground warehouse.

He managed to get in without being noticed, he ~~ga-came~~ hide in the ceiling and what he saw a almost made him fall off.

The two main gangs had almost every military weapons created and enough for 3 armys.

~~t then~~ He tried to get out but

"Don't leave so soon Mr. Bounty Hunter' ~~helgar~~ the leader ~~helgar~~ said'

"The name's Plaz...Plaz Hunter" Plaz said

"I'm kelgor and this is Kelek" he said pointing to this gut who had half a robot face.

"your the guy who killed Quester aren't you" Kelek said

"Yep and your ~~necked~~ next scum bag"

"Ha Ha Ha you are in no position to make threats. Now you must be good to of kill Quester that's why we got some insurance" Kelek said while two guards pulled sam out of a hut tied up.

Plaz drew his gun but ~~h~~ before he could do anything they both had guns to Sam's head.

"You see we've ~~were~~ been on to you since you kill Quester"

"So no matter what I did I'd~~e~~ of lost hu"

"that's right you see every since those time crystals were baned we've been working on this and we can't afford anything to happen". Kelgor said

"What exactly are ~~i~~ you doing? ~~here~~" Plaz asked

"Well can't do~~n~~ anything now so I guess it's o.k.ay. This big machine you see here is a sort of big vesion of the time crysal except it opens a door big enough to fit a battle tank, and thats what were going to do. we are going back to the year 1989 where we are going to take over the earth and the entier milky way and with our superier weapons that will be easy"kelgor said

Plaz knew they could do it.

They switch on the machine and got all their things and walked through to door but just before they walked through Plaz managed to change the place of arivel from America ~~h~~ to London ~~d~~england Plaz also found out that their weapons will not come through strait away so Plaz got hiss arm to build a remote control which opens the door back to the year 8964ad trouble was the door could only stay there for 4 7 days but sams life deperened on it so Plaz picked up his weapons and walked through.

Plaz arrived in an ~~aly~~ aley somewhere in the west end. Plaz managed to hitch a lift to tottenham. (Plaz's ex-home town). The first thing Plaz had to do was find somewhere to stay the only place which came to mind was his best friend Ray (Raymond) who was ~~t~~ one of the few people Plaz trusted. ~~he knocked~~

~~±~~ He eventually found the house and managed to pluk up enough courage to ring the door bell, luckily Ray was the only person home.

"Hi Ray" Plaz said try to look pitiful

"Hi who are.. wait a minute Pony (Plaz's name which he used ~~#~~ from the book the outsiders)

"Yep you remember"

"of course I remember my best friend, come in" Ray said dragging Plaz in.

"I've changed my name again its Plaz Hunter now"

"well Plaz ...where in the hell! did you go"

"It's a long story, Ray"

"I got a lot of time"

Plaz started to tell the story from the time he gave sam a lift to the time he arrived in the alley.

"So you've been in the future all this time hu" Ray said

"look I lost my arm and they gave me this"

Plaz ripped his sleeve and took the leather glove off his hand to reveal his robotic arm and demonstrated what it could do

"O.K. I believe, so what do you want from me?"

"I need a few favours one I need somewhere to put the weapons when they come, then I need somewhere for sam to stay when I save her o.k."

"Yer I suppose, I never could stay mad at you long"

"Now they're probably waiting for their weapons but when they find out I've got the lot they'll probably get some twentyeth century weapons which I suppose is good"

"The class isn't the same without you, you know everyone thought you ran away to america. I guess they were right in away. Kim was asking about you, she wanted to know why you left without saying good-bye she was very upset"

"Kim was asking about me? gosh I always thought she didn't like me, remember how I used to follow her around giving her roses every two seconds" just then remote control was beeping Plaz opened the time door and all the weapons came through. Plaz took the ones he needed and gave the rest to Ray to hide. Plaz got radio contact with kelgor & kelek he arranged a meeting with them to exchange sam for the weapons, but they found out about the school and arranged the meeting at their school. Plaz had no choice but to agree.

The next day Plaz went to the school where hovering on top of the building was the fists battle ship. All the kids were there looking in amazement at the ship as Plaz walked in some of the petrol men for the first time started to block off all the exits.

Plaz realized that they didn't have any proper guns just some uzis and M.16. M60. AK47s etc....so he outclassed them in weaponry but the odds were against him he knew that if there was a gun fight some kids might get hurt, so he played it cool.

"let the girl go and I'll tell you where your weapons are" Plaz said

"Do you honestly think we would let her go without the weapons"

"I'll tell you where they are"

"Not good enough"

"O.K. before I do anything ~~eats days~~ I want to see that she's O.k."

"Whats the matter "Hunter" ~~ye~~ don't you trust us kelgor said laughingly.

"just bring her out here metal face" (After the fight with the space patrol kelgor & kelek sufered surier damages kelgor had half his face and a arm ~~damage~~ burnt off which were replace his face was replaced by a metal platehis arm had to go and was replaced by another arm with a claw instead of an hand. kelek had most of his face replaced and an arm which had a double barreled gun instead of a hand he also lost a leg which was replaced by a mechanical one)

Two of kelgors goons dragged Sam out, Sam managed to free her mouth

"Plaz they've got kim its a double" er they gagged her and dragged her back in.

"Thats right we have them both so don't try any funny stuff o.k.Plaz" Kelgor said disgustedly.

Now Plaz was angry. Kim was a girl he use to like a lot. Plaz knew they would not hesertate to kill them both. Plaz needed some adzice so he came to Ray who always helped.

"Plaz you've got to help, they've kim now"

"How? How did they find out?"

"I don't know Ray I do knowthat if they don't get the guns then kim and! Sam are both dead, but if they get the guns then were all dead, so whats my next move?"

There was a long pause while Ray was thinking then

"I've got it! you say your arm can do anything then why don't you make a hologram of the truck and you andg also sent signals that their both real and ask for 2 goons to bring both the girls out and put them in a car which be waiting and your away."

Ray said

"It just might work".

The next day plaz got everything everything ready ~~and~~ but he made a few alterations to the plan.

It was about 10.00am and the place was crawling with feds and soldiers, Plaz tried to to talk some sence into them

"look you can't open fire theres 2 hostages inth there who could die".

"go away sonny, this a mans g job, get ready with the bazooka, aim,f."

Plaz knocked him out and pulled out his fas gun put in on stunt and started to shot, he only shot about five until they started to flee. Plaz knew they'd be back so he had no time to waiste-

everything went according to plan until

"Sam you can drive get out of her the address is there"

Plaz got out of the car and sam drove off reluctantly.

The fists had obviously cut on and started to fire at Plaz who just pulled out his gun and shot a few troopers, then he pulled his fusion canon from his back and started to blast.

Plaz had to get inside the school building because right there he was in the open.

He blasted door and put his fusion canon back on his back and pulled his hand gun out. He made his way through the school kill the troopers who tried to stop him, he eventually got to the part of the building where the ship was on top of.

Plaz produced some explosives from his arm and placed them under the ship and ran out. as soon as he got out he detonated them, the explosion blew plaz a few yards away but apart from that he was o.k. sam had come back to see if Plaz was o.k. "Plaz are you alright?"

"Yeh...I guess"

"Now this is over how do we get back home?" "With this" Plaz gave sam the remote. Sam opened the door and began to walk when

"Not so fast Hunter I'm not dead yet"

Standing a few yards away from Plaz was a bloody Kelgor with 5 troopers who had guns pointing at Plaz

"Kelgor how?"

"Don't worry it won't be painful they'll just blow your brains out" he laughed

Plaz went for his gun but he was too slow.

Plaz was doomed he had no chance. They made him drop his gun and sam was unarmed, the troopers cocked the guns and took aim and just as they were about to shoot kelgor dropped down dead with a stake in his back and kim behind shivering. the troopers stopped as well because they were only alive to serve kelgor so when he dies they have no reason for living.

"kim what"

"he was going to kill you so I had to do something"

"but you" kim started to cry and plaz took her in his arms

"I just didn't want you to leave without saying goodbye Again"

"you down there drop your weapons you haven't got a chance" said soldier in a gunship, then tanks started to come.

"you better go Plaz before they get you" kim said pointing Plaz to the time door.

Plaz picked up his gun and began to walk through. then he turned around

"Goodbye Kim Sam"

"Bye Plaz" kim blew him a kiss.

just then Ray somehow managed to bring the truck full of guns and Plaz took it

through with him.

Plaz was sitting in his car patching himself up after his encounter with the flaming fists when an under cover cop came upto him

"Are you Plaz Huntr th Private Investigator the freelance peace keeping agent the Bounty Hunter?"

"What if I'm oo wants to know?"

"Cheif Inspector Browning"

"Never heard of him pal"

"If you don't come willingly then I'll be pforced to arest you"

"On what charge?"

"I'll think of something"

PIAz didn't want any trouble so he went with the cop to the Police Dept. where he met Browning, who ~~want~~ was the kind of cop who hides behide a desk taking the credit for others peoples work.

"Plaz Hunter I prosume" Browning said

"Have a seat"

"What do you want?" Asked Plaz

"You ever heard of The Rock?"

"Yeh is that prison the size of earth's moon. High securaty job. Impossible to escape from"

"Nor any more" Browning said shaking his head

"what?"

"come with me"

Browning took a Plaz to a small room with a projector on a small table in the middle of the room.

~~"I want yo~~ A few days ago 4 highly dangerous killers broke out of there killing 15 guards. We have reason to belive they came here"

Browning switched on the projector ~~showing a picture of a mans face,~~

"This is John Reed. known as distructor for reasons you can probably sus out. he's very stronge, he can brake someone's neck with a punch, he waaers armer on his chest and carries an iron club around with him, he's not that much of a threat,

"This is The Blade, we don't know his real name but we do know he's very dangerous, he has four Razor sharp claws which retracted from his knuckles, he also has two double Bladed swords and probobly has more weapons ~~and~~ knowing him, he's a ~~phice~~ psicopath but without his knives he's nothing

This is Johnny Sacasico something or other known as Lightning Shadow for his speed and discretion, his assistant Browning stopped to think, he started to click his fingers "Ninja or Nin something away"

"Ninja" Plaz ~~corrected~~ said Plaz correcting Browning.

"Yeah that's it Ninja, anyway he's a ninja warrior, I think it's one of those ~~unarm~~ unarmed combat things"

"It's an ancient Martial art, it gives you the ability to defend yourself against almost any weapon" Plaz said.

"Whatever it is it's dangerous, we don't know much about him."

~~This~~ And finally this is Adam Banx known as Blaster for his love of explosions he's probably the leader he's the one who probably ~~the one who~~ thought of the escape plan"

"So why you telling me this?"

"Because I want you to bring them in Dead or alive"

"What ... You want me to bring them in after what you've told me are you crazy?"

Plaz got up the leave

"You took on the flaming fist didn't you compared to them this lot are nothing"

"No. not really, the fists were an army of androids or cyborgs who couldn't think for themselves selects that's why I beat them, not each one of these four has his own mind and can think for himself"

Plaz began to leave but then stopped and looked at Browning and laughed and then continued to walk out.

~~come on Plaz~~

"I don't see why your men ~~couldn't~~ can't handle this"

"Because last time we went after them I almost lost all my men not even the army could handle this"

"So how did you catch them?"

"A Bounty Hunter called Zefs ever heard of him?"

"NO"

"He was the best bounty hunter this side of the Melcor sun until he mysteriously disappeared"

"So why me?"

"Because you're the BEST! Because you're smart you think before you lead and ~~Because we need I know you can have~~ your different from everyone"

Plaz opened the door to leave but then decided to take the case

"I'll take the case on one condition you give me a travel pass anywhere I want which doesn't expire, and the smallest most fastest space-cruiser in the galaxy"

~~wait~~ Now hold on there, we can't give you"

"Good-bye then"

"Wait o.k.,o.k. you win, but I want them alive, don't shoot unless you have too"

Plaz went to the back-street where he know that they must've come through, he asked everyone but no^{one} knew anything which he knew was a lie~~then~~, he wait outside of most obvius ~~bar~~ place they would turn up in, it was a bar called Maxamillions air bar, this is the place where everyone who plaz asked lied about not knowing where the ~~preps~~ Perps~~were~~(criminals (Perpeitrators) ~~wez~~ was. (6238 words)















